

J.A.H.

THE RIFLE RANG OUT

IN TEXAS WITH DAVY CROCKETT

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In Texas With Davy Crockett

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CHAPTER I

DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI

THE towering stacks of the steamboat "Mediterranean" sent their clouds of smoke, black and wind rent, across the sky ; her sharp bow cut the yellow waters of the Mississippi and dashed the spray as high as her rails.

The cabins were thronged with passengers ; the forward deck was tiered high with bales and barrels and boxes of merchandise.

Two boys sat by the rail upon the upper deck ; their faces were earnest and they talked in low tones.

"Are you quite sure that Sam Davidge is on board, Walt?" asked one.

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“I’d know him among a whole city-full, let alone a cabin-full,” answered Walter Jordan. “And I’ve seen him three times to-day.”

The other boy frowned and looked out over the wide river toward the Arkansas shore.

“It’s queer,” said he. “It’s very queer that he should just happen to be going down the river at the same time we are.”

Walter Jordan gave his friend a quick look.

“Ned,” said he, “chance has nothing to do with it—as I think you know.”

Ned Chandler nodded.

“He’s on board because we are ; he’s trying to find out where we are going.” The boy ran his fingers through his short light hair, and his blue eyes snapped. “I never did think much of Davidge ; and I think less of him now than I did before.”

Walter Jordan leaned back in his chair and clasped one knee with his hands. He

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was a tall, well-built young fellow of eighteen with a broad chest and shoulders, and a good-looking, resolute face.

“When we boarded the ‘General Greene’ at Louisville,” said he, “I thought I saw Davidge in the crowd. But you know what a miserable, wet night it was and how the lamps on the pier flickered. So I couldn’t be sure.”

“You never mentioned it to me,” said Ned, complainingly.

“I didn’t want to until I was sure. I thought there was no use getting up an excitement about a thing that might turn out to have nothing behind it.”

From somewhere around the high tiers of bales, a negro deck hand picked a tune out of a banjo; and the rhythmic shuffle and pit-pat-pit of feet told of another who danced to the music.

“All the way down the Ohio on the ‘Greene’ I noticed you were very quiet and watchful,” spoke young Chandler. “But

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to me it only meant that you were careful. I never thought of anything else."

Walter Jordan looked at his friend, and there was a troubled look in his eyes.

"And Sam Davidge isn't all we have to worry us," said he, in a lower tone. "When we reached the Mississippi, and changed to this boat, I noticed something else."

Ned caught the troubled look, and though he did not in the least suspect the cause of it, his own round face took on one just like it.

"What was it?" he asked.

"Have you seen a man on board whom they all call Colonel Huntley?"

Ned's eyes went to the cabin door where he had noticed two persons a few moments before; the two were still there and intently examining them.

"Yes," said Ned. "I know whom you mean."

"I didn't understand it, and I don't like it," said Walter, the troubled look growing deeper, "but there is never a time I look

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toward him that I don't find his eyes upon me."

"Humph!" said Ned. And then: "Well, Walt, he's not changed his ways any. Don't look around just yet, or he'll see that we've been speaking of him. He's over by the cabin door behind you, and he's looking this way for all he's worth."

"Alone?" asked Walter.

"No. That fellow Barker is with him."

"Barker's like his shadow," said Walter. "You never see one without the other."

Colonel Huntley was a man of perhaps forty years, tall and powerfully built. He wore a long frock coat of gray cloth, doe-skin trousers, and long shining boots. Upon his head was a bell-crowned beaver hat with a curling brim. In the immaculately white stock about his neck was a large diamond set in rough gold.

The person beside him was a young fellow of perhaps twenty, with huge, thick shoulders and a round bullet head.

IN TEXAS

“Tell me,” said Ned, his eyes upon the two but his mind, apparently, upon a subject altogether foreign to them, “do you think Colonel Huntley has anything to do with Davidge?”

“I feel sure of it,” replied Walter. “When either of us is about, Sam keeps hidden. But when the coast’s clear, or they think it is, he is to be seen in out-of-the-way corners, earnestly discussing something with Colonel Huntley.”

“I can see that I’ve been missing a great deal,” said young Chandler. “But that’s past. In the future I’m going to keep both eyes wide open. Earnest conversation in out-of-the-way corners means only one thing. And that is: that something is under way which has a good bit to do with our trip to Texas.”

There was a silence for a space. Ned continued covertly to inspect the two at the cabin door. Walter gazed ahead along the broad stretch of the Mississippi; on the left

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was the thickly timbered shore of Tennessee; and that of Arkansas frowned at them from the right.

The "Mediterranean" was a large boat; she was deeply loaded with cargo and carried a great throng of passengers. But passengers were always plentiful in those early days of the year 1836; for the situation between Texas and Mexico had grown acute; war had spread its sombre wings for a terrible flight across that new land; the adventurers and soldiers of fortune of the States were swarming toward the southwest.

Those men who had fought in the many wars with the Indians, who had carried the line of the frontier forward step by step, who had leveled the wilderness and subdued the forces which spring up in the path of civilization, had long ago turned their eyes toward the vast empire north of the Rio Grande. They saw it loosely held by an inferior race; they saw a hardy, fearless

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band of Americans resisting oppression and preparing to repulse the advance of Santa Anna. And so each steamer down the Mississippi carried a horde of them, armed and ready to do their part.

Since boarding the boat the boys had heard little else but Texas. The name seemed to be on every tongue. And even now, as they sat thinking over the turn that seemed to have taken place in their own affairs, the loud voices that came to their ears from the cabin held to the subject.

“A pack of mongrels, that’s what they are,” said a voice above the clatter. “And not a good fight among them. The idea of their trying to dictate to a free people like the Texans what shall and what shall not be done.”

Another man seemed stunned by the immense area of the new land.

“Just think of the size of it!” cried he, in high admiration. “Eight hundred and

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twenty-five miles long, and seven hundred and forty miles wide. It's twice as big as Great Britain and Ireland, and bigger than France, Holland, Belgium and Denmark put together."

"Who says a country like that is not worth fighting for?" shouted another voice. "Who says it shouldn't belong to these United States?"

"Let Santa Anna poke his nose across the Coahuila line, and he'll get it cut off with a bowie knife," said still another adventurer.

"It seems to me," said Walter Jordan, "that we couldn't have had a worse time to carry out our errand to Texas than just now. The closer we get to it, the more war-like things are."

Ned Chandler looked at his friend in surprise.

"What, Walter," said he, "you're not holding back because things are not all quiet and orderly, are you?"

Walter smiled.

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"I'm headed for Texas, and going as fast as this boat will take me," said he. "And I mean to keep on going until I get there and do what we set out to do."

Ned laughed in a pleased sort of way. There was a light of adventure in his eyes.

"Why do you object to the coming war with the Mexicans, then?" said he. "That will make only the more fun on our trip south."

"But fun is not what we've come for," said Walter. "We've got a purpose in view, and until that's accomplished, we must think of nothing else."

Ned grew more sober.

"Right you are," said he. "Not a thing must enter our minds but the one thing, until it's done. But after that," and his eyes began to dance once more, "we can take time to look around us a bit, can't we?"

"Why, I suppose that would do no harm. But mind you, Ned, not until then."

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“Not for a moment,” said Ned Chandler.

“You can count on me, Walt.”

Again there was a silence between them, and once more the voices came from the cabin.

“I know the settlement of Texas from start to finish,” said the loud-voiced man. “First the French built a fort; then they left, and the Spanish came and built missions, and called the state the New Philippines, and began to fight the Comanche and Apache. When the United States bought the Louisiana territory from France, trouble began with Spain. We claimed everything north of the Rio Grande; but the Spaniards said the Sabine was the natural line.”

“I recall the things that followed that,” said another voice. “I was quite a youngster then, and was in New Orleans. Every little while expeditions were formed to invade Texas and fight the Spanish. One, I remember, was while the war with England

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was going on ; and the Spanish were licked, losing a thousand men.”

“Then Steve Austin went into the territory and planted a colony,” went on the first speaker. “The new Mexican republic stuck Coahuila on to Texas and tried to make one state of them. But when the Americans in the country got a little stronger they rebelled against this, passed a resolution and sent it to Santa Anna, asking that Texas be admitted into the republic as a separate state.”

“They might have known that he wouldn’t listen to such a thing,” said the other man. “‘The Napoleon of the West’ he likes to be called, but a more detestable tyrant never oppressed an honest people.”

“Well, when he tried to go against the will of Texas, they gave him right smart whippings at Goliad and Concepcion, elected Smith governor, and Sam Houston commander of the army. Then they

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smashed into San Antonio and ran the Mexicans out of Texas."

"Nothing will ever come of it until they cut away from Mexico for good and all," said the second man. "I'm not for Texas as an independent state in the Mexican Republic. What I want to see, and what thousands of others want to see, is Texas, a republic itself, entirely free of Mexico, or else Texas, a state in our own Union."

This saying met with much favor; the babble of voices arose, mingled with the clapping of hands.

"For," went on the speaker, raising his voice that he might be heard, "as long as they stick to Mexico, just that long will they keep in hot water. Santa Anna may be, at this minute, marching against them with an army. And he will keep on marching against them until they make themselves altogether independent of him and his gang."

Here Walter Jordan arose.

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"Let's go inside," said he. "They all seem to be quite interested."

Ned also got up.

"Do you think there will ever be such a thing as the Texas republic?" said he.

Walter shrugged his shoulders.

"It's hard to say. But if the Texans are anything at all like what I hear they are, it wouldn't surprise me if it came about some day."

And so they turned toward the cabin door, and Walter found himself face to face with Colonel Huntley.

CHAPTER II

THE PLOT

COLONEL HUNTLEY had cold gray eyes which, when he chose, had an insult in their every glance. And now, as Walter Jordan's eyes met his, he never stirred from the cabin door. Quietly the lad stood and looked at him ; and the cold, valuing eyes were filled with mockery.

“ Do you want anything ? ” he asked, sneeringly.

“ I wish to go into the cabin,” replied the boy. “ Will you kindly step out of the way ? ”

Colonel Huntley laughed in an unpleasant manner, but did not move.

“ I think,” said he, “ I’ve seen you somewhere before.”

“ Perhaps,” said the boy.

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“You’re the son of Carroll Jordan, attorney, at Louisville?” said Colonel Huntley.

“I am,” said Walter.

“I knew your father,” sneered Huntley.

“If you did,” came the boy’s swift reply, “you knew one of the finest gentlemen in Kentucky.”

The mockery in Huntley’s eyes increased.

“That depends altogether on how one looks at it,” said he.

When Walter Jordan spoke there was a ring in his voice which Ned Chandler knew well.

“Looked at in the right way,” said the lad, “and by that I mean the way in which any fair and honest person would look at it, there can be only one opinion. And that is the one which I have given.”

The bullet-headed young man grinned widely, showing a row of strong teeth, with wide spaces between them. He nodded to Colonel Huntley.

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“That’s talking,” said he. “Right to your face, too.”

Huntley had a satisfied look in his face; his cold eyes examined Walter from head to foot. Ned Chandler plucked at his friend’s sleeve, and breathed into his ear.

“Look out! He’s trying to get you into some kind of a muss.”

“So,” spoke Huntley, and his tones were as cold as his eyes, “you don’t consider me either fair or honest, then?”

Walter met the man’s look steadily.

“I have not mentioned you,” said he. “I referred to those persons who might, as you suggested, speak ill of my father. *You* have not said what you thought, sir.”

Again Huntley laughed his unpleasant laugh.

“You are something of a diplomat,” said he. “Or, had I better say, a dodger.”

“Why, if I cared to,” said Walter, quietly, “I might say almost the same thing of yourself. Put yourself on record—say openly

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what you mean, and I will give you an answer, plain enough for you or anybody else."

There was a silence after the boy's bold words. Ned Chandler's eyes snapped with delight, for here was a chance for excitement. Colonel Huntley hesitated—not at all because he had not a ready word or act, but apparently because he feared to trust himself. It was his bullet-headed companion who spoke.

"I've heard of your father," said he. "I've been told of the little game he's up to; and I think he's trying to feather his own nest."

Apparently stung to the quick, young Jordan whirled upon the speaker, his hand drawn back for a blow. But he felt an iron clutch on his wrist, and saw the burly chief mate of the "Mediterranean" at his side.

"None of that," said the mate, sternly. "No fighting here. There are women passengers, you know."

The bullet-headed youth had stepped

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aside at Walter's first swift motion; this left a space in the cabin doorway, and seizing the chance, Ned Chandler crowded his friend through and pushed him along the full length of the men's cabin, in spite of his efforts to halt.

"Now," said the light-haired boy, when they finally brought up in an unoccupied corner, "before you say anything, let me tell you what I think." He shoved his hands down into his trousers pockets, and eyed his friend calmly.

"You were a little excited out there," said he, "and maybe you didn't see what I saw."

"I saw that Colonel Huntley deliberately set out to insult me," said Walter, his eyes glinting with anger, his fists clenched.

"That's true," said Ned, coolly. "So he did. And more than that."

Walter looked at his friend, for in his tone he noted a something which attracted his attention.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

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“The whole thing was arranged,” said Ned, nodding his head assuredly. “Those two planted themselves in the doorway to wait for you. Colonel Huntley was to provoke you, and that fellow Barker was to step in at the right moment and pick a fight with you.”

Walter threw up his hand and his angry eyes sought the length of the men’s cabin.

“Well,” said he, his hands tightly clenched, “it’s not too late, if he’s still of the same mind.”

But Ned Chandler shook his head; apparently he did not agree with his friend’s present humor.

“I know how you must feel,” said he, “to hear your father badly spoken of in a thing like this. He’s giving his money and his time and his learning to do a thing which will never bring him a penny of gain. He’s sending you on a mission to a distant place like Texas, just because he wants to see right done. And to hear

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people say things, like those Huntley and Barker have said, is hard to bear. But you must bear it."

"I will not!" said Walter steadily, his eyes still searching the cabin for the two men.

As a rule, young Jordan was the cooler and more thoughtful of the two boys. Ned was the impulsive one, the plunger into adventure, a rollicking, harum-scarum youngster. But, so it seemed, what had been said against his father had stirred Walter deeply and made him throw his usual caution aside. And seeing this, Ned, who was observant enough when he was so inclined, had seized the helm and was now guiding the craft of their fortunes.

"Such people as those," said Walter, "are of the sort who make a business of bullying. They try to browbeat every one they meet; and they are encouraged by people's giving in to them. And I don't mean to do that."

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“That Barker has a bad look,” said Ned, “and he’s a pretty strong-looking fellow. No, no,” hastily, as he caught sight of the expression that came into his friend’s face, “of course his strength wouldn’t make any difference to you. But take a look at it from the other side. These two haven’t planned this thing with just the idea of getting you into a fight. They are deeper than that.” He put his hand upon Walter’s arm. “Suppose,” said he, in a lower tone, “you were hurt. What then?”

Walter looked at young Chandler, and gradually the expression of his face changed.

“Our trip to Texas would be delayed,” said he.

“That’s it,” said Ned. “And they would get there ahead of you; and the thing your father is so set on doing for this girl in Texas would never be done.”

The anger had now altogether left Walter Jordan’s face; he laid his hand upon Ned’s shoulder.

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"You are right," said he. "I see it now. That's just what they are after. And I see Sam Davidge's hand in it. He's planned it with them."

The two sat down upon chairs in the corner to discuss this new aspect. The men's cabin was crowded with all sorts of travelers; and the clatter and rumble of voices went on with the regularity of the engine's throb. Almost every walk of life was represented among the passengers. Planters on the way down the river to Natchez or New Orleans; sharpers on the lookout for some easy means of gaining money; slave dealers, the sellers of plantation requirements, steamboat men, drovers, adventurers and desperadoes on their way to the new country—Texas.

These latter were easily known by their dress and manner. Some were elegantly attired in the fashion of the time, others wore flannel shirts and wide-rimmed hats, and had the legs of their trousers stuffed

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into long leather boots. Still another class possessed the hunting shirt, deerskin leggings and coonskin cap of the backwoodsman. All were armed with pistol, knife and rifle; and all had the free, loud, independent ways of their kind.

“Texas,” declared the man with the strong voice which the lads had heard while upon the deck, “was never made for Mexicans. It’s a great country, and none but white men are fit to own it. I, for one, am going down there with a rifle that can snuff out a candle at fifty yards, and I’m going to have a personal word for Santa Anna if I ever run across him.”

A shout went up from the adventurers, rifle butts rattled upon the cabin floor and brawny fists thumped tables and the arms of chairs.

“Now you’re shouting!” cried another man, a lank backwoodsman in a fringed buckskin shirt. “Let them stop palavering and get to work. Greasers’ll never do

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anything but talk if you talk with them. Lead's my way of conversing with such folks—lead out of a rifle barrel, and with a good eye behind it."

"What's the committee that's got charge of things doing down there?" asked a booted and burly man in a soiled flannel shirt and a huge Remington revolver sticking in his belt. "Why don't they get to some kind of an agreement, and let Sam Houston loose to march against the Greasers. As my friend here says, talk's no good, if it's not backed up by rifles. What they need is to give Houston about five thousand men who know how to shoot, and in three months' time you'll never hear another word from Santa Anna and his gang."

While they talked, the boys kept their eyes fixed upon the people in the cabin, watching for Huntley or his shadow. Just then the whistle of the steamboat shrieked and the engine slowed down in answer to the pilot's bell.

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"We're about to make a landing," said Ned, his gaze going to a window. "See how near the Tennessee shore is."

"It's a place called Randolph," said a planter who sat near by.

"Going to take on some passengers, I suppose," said Ned.

"And while the boat's doing that," said Walter, steadily watching two figures who were pushing their way through the crowded cabin toward them, "I think you and I'll be entertaining Colonel Huntley and his friend Mr. Barker."

CHAPTER III

THE QUARREL

NED CHANDLER looked toward the place indicated by his friend and, sure enough, he saw Huntley and Barker approaching.

“Take care,” said Ned, warningly, but with his blue eyes snapping. “Don’t get yourself hurt. But if they crowd trouble on you, don’t step back. Give them all they want.”

If Walter Jordan expected Colonel Huntley to open hostilities when he approached, he merely showed that he did not know the methods of that gentleman. As a matter of fact, Huntley did not appear to notice either of the two young fellows; Barker, however, gave Walter a lowering sidelong look as he took a vacant chair near the one newly occupied by the colonel.

“Well, Huntley,” said one of those

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near by, "it's rather a surprise to see you on board."

"I didn't expect to be, up to a very few days ago," said the colonel. He placed his feet, with insolent deliberation, upon the small table upon which young Jordan was leaning, and began to slap at his boot leg with the light stick which he carried. "A thing came up which I had to attend to in a hurry."

"I see," said the other. "Going down to New Orleans, I suppose?"

"No," replied Colonel Huntley, "I'm going to Texas."

The cold eyes of the man, as he said this, fixed themselves upon Walter; the sneer was once more upon his lips. The young fellow regarded him with no trace of the hot anger of a short time before; nevertheless there was that in his manner which said as plainly as words that he was no more inclined to accept an affront then than he had been before.

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"Go on," said the steady, watchful eyes. "I'll say nothing if I'm not pushed to it. But, you know, there's a line which you must not cross."

The man whom Huntley addressed looked amazed at his statement.

"Texas!" exclaimed he. "Why, I had no idea that you were interested in the liberation of that territory."

Both Colonel Huntley and Barker laughed.

"I'm not," said the colonel. "My mission is something else." He looked at the other inquiringly. "You remember Tom Norton, who once ran a newspaper at Nashville?"

"Of course," said the other. "Very well. And his wife and little daughter."

"Tom went to Texas," said Huntley.

"I understood he started another paper at Natchez," said the man.

Huntley nodded.

"He did. But like the one at Nashville,

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it didn't last long. He took his family to Texas, and settled at San Antonio. Both Tom and his wife are dead. The girl is grown up and is still at San Antonio."

"I see," said the other, and looked at Huntley with the expression of a man who knows that more is coming.

"Norton had some rich relations at Louisville; they've gone too, and have left a fortune to the girl, who knows nothing at all of it."

"And so you are on your way to San Antonio to tell her?"

"Yes, to tell her; and also to keep her out of the clutches of a hawk of a Louisville lawyer who's interested himself in the case."

Ned Chandler looked at his friend; but Walter was still quiet and still had the steady look in his eyes.

"Good enough," thought Ned. "He'll not do anything unless they force him."

"So," said the planter, who was conversing with Colonel Huntley, "the birds of

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prey have smelled out the money, have they?"

"Yes," replied the colonel, switching at his boot leg with the stick. "As soon as the news went abroad that there was a rich haul to be had, this particular shark began to stir himself. He claims to be the executor of the estate; he has a lot of useless papers, and has sent emissaries to Texas to get possession of the girl."

The planter laughed.

"Well, he's energetic, at all events," said he. "But what's his name?"

"Jordan," answered Huntley.

An exclamation of surprise came from the planter.

"Not Carroll Jordan!" said he.

"The same," said Huntley, nodding.

"You amaze me," said the planter. "This is the first time I ever heard anything said against Counsellor Jordan. As far as I've ever been able to learn, he's rated as high as justice itself."

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Huntley shook his head ; from the corners of his cold eyes he watched the young man opposite him.

“That’s what the public thinks,” said he. “And the public seldom gets at the truth of things.”

The planter seemed puzzled.

“Maybe so,” said he, not at all convinced. “But somehow I can’t get it into my mind as a fact. If you were talking of a sharper such as Sam Davidge, that other Louisville attorney, I could understand it.”

Ned Chandler noted the expression that crossed the face of Colonel Huntley at this and he choked back a chuckle. Young Jordan leaned forward, quietly.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said he to the planter ; “but it might interest you to know that, in the case you are discussing, Sam Davidge is on the other side.”

The planter seemed surprised both at the statement and at Walter’s interruption.

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His eyes went to Huntley. But the latter said nothing. It was Barker who spoke.

“Look here,” said the bullet-headed personage to young Jordan. “What do you mean by forcing yourself into a conversation which does not concern you?”

The young fellow looked at him, still quietly.

“I think you are mistaken,” said he. “The conversation does concern me intimately.” Then turning to the planter he added, “You’ll understand that, sir, when I tell you that I am the son of Carroll Jordan whom Colonel Huntley has seen fit to slander.”

Huntley’s cold eyes stared into those of the speaker; he lounged back in his chair, and when he spoke his voice was menacing.

“This is the second time in the last half hour,” said he, “that you’ve taken occasion to rub me the wrong way. If you were well acquainted with me you wouldn’t do it.”

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"I think," returned the young man, calmly, "that I am as well acquainted with you as I care to be. Your method of doing things, Colonel Huntley, is not to my taste. I dislike a man who sets out to insult some one whom he's opposed to, and then steps aside so that some one in his pay may do the dirty work."

"What's that?" snarled Barker, rising to his feet.

"Your plan, Colonel Huntley," went on Walter Jordan, disregarding the bullet-headed young man entirely, and addressing himself to his principal, "is rather a good one, as plans go. You would get the result you are after, and yet would not actively figure in the matter. I suppose Sam Davidge arranged that with you in the secret consultations you've been having in the last little while."

Barker, an ugly expression upon his face, tapped young Jordan on the shoulder.

"Talk to me," said he. "You've said I

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do some one's dirty work ; and so I'm going to give you a chance to prove it."

But here Ned Chandler pushed himself between the two.

"In a few minutes," said he to Barker, and there was no mistaking his meaning, "you'll have everything proved to your satisfaction, and in any way you care to have it done. So step back and don't worry."

"The whole thing," proceeded Jordan to Colonel Huntley, and still in the coolest possible manner, "looks like one of Davidge's shrewd tricks. He knew, somehow, where I was going. He followed, skulking in the background. In some way he must prevent my getting to Texas. He took you into his council. You had a way. You'd provoke me into a quarrel and then set this hound on me," pointing to the snarling Barker, "in the hope that he'd injure me."

Slowly Colonel Huntley took his booted

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feet from off the table ; with equal slowness he arose to his feet. His cold, light eyes had the deadly look that comes into those of the cat tribe when about to spring.

“ I’ve listened to what you’ve had to say,” said he, evenly. “ And now you will listen to me. You’ve openly and deliberately insulted me.”

The palm of young Jordan’s hand came down with a smack upon the table.

“ I am the insulted one,” said he. “ You put yourself in my way a while ago to insult me. You followed me here to renew your slander when I tried to avoid you. But what I have said concerning you is the truth. You are associated with Davidge in his plot to get possession of Ethel Norton’s estate. I charge you with that to your teeth ; and here I am to back it up.”

The cold look in Huntley’s face was now one of triumph.

“ If you were old enough and worth my attention in a practical way,” said he,

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calmly, "I'd take you ashore and shoot you after the accepted code. But as I can't bother myself with you, I'll turn you over to my friend here; for you have affronted him as much as you have myself. And perhaps he'll care to pay some attention to you."

Ned Chandler grinned at this.

"Still sticking to your little arrangement, eh, colonel?" said he. "Ah, well, there's nothing in the world like being steadfast."

"Colonel Huntley can suit himself in this thing," said Barker, his heavy face fixed in a scowl. "But I'll do the same. If it's his notion to pass this matter by, all very well. But I will not. You've said something to me, and about me, that was meant to be offensive; and you've got to give me satisfaction."

During the progress of this altercation, all other conversation in the cabin of the "Mediterranean" had gradually ceased.

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All eyes were now upon Water Jordan and the threatening figure of Barker; for it looked as though the bullet-headed one would spring at the young fellow's throat at any instant. And the idea of an impending fight was pleasing to the wild spirits which crowded the boat; for conflict was the breath of their nostrils.

"Who's the fellow who's looking so tarnation mad?" asked a lank backwoodsman who nursed a long rifle across his knees. "He puts his head down like a wild buffalo."

"His name's Barker," said a traveler. "I've been up and down the river for the last five years, and in that time he's gained a wide reputation as a rough-and-tumble fighter."

"I've heard of him," spoke a flannel-shirted adventurer, hitching at the belt which supported a pair of huge revolvers. "Almost killed a man at Nashville not long ago."

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"The other one don't look to be the same kind of a critter," said the backwoodsman. "Kind of better bred and not so rugged in the shoulders."

"He looks as though he could give a good account of himself, though," put in the commercial drummer. "I'd give a nice sum to see Barker beaten soundly. He's got the reputation of being the most troublesome bruiser on the river."

Nearer and nearer the "Mediterranean" swung toward the Tennessee shore; the negro roustabouts upon the wharf stood ready to carry and trundle aboard the miscellaneous articles of cargo which awaited the craft. A thin array of passengers was also waiting. Upon the decks of the steamboat stood the captain and his mates; their orders were given curtly and the deck hands sprang alertly to obey them.

Noting the boat's proximity to the shore, Colonel Huntley said something to Barker

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in a low voice. Barker's eyes went to a cabin window as though in reply to some suggestion and an evil look came into his dull face.

"Let us see," said he to Walter, "if you are as ready with your fists as you are with your tongue. The officers of the boat don't care to have any trouble aboard, so, as we'll tie up to a wharf in a few minutes, let's take our affairs ashore, and have it out without any interference."

"Good!" cried Ned Chandler. "That suits us down to the ground. Let it be ashore, by all means."

Acting upon one impulse the passengers streamed out upon the deck; there was a hurrying of deck hands, a sharp calling of orders and the jingling of the pilot's bell. Then with a great splashing of her wheels and a straining of hawsers, the "Mediterranean" lay quietly at the wharf.

Instantly the gangplank was run out and the singing negroes began to roll on

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the cargo. Walter Jordan and Ned vaulted over the rail ; a horde of passengers followed, among them being Colonel Huntley and Barker.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT

AT the head of the wharf was an open space, and when they reached this Barker halted, and stripped off his coat.

“No use going any farther, gentlemen,” said he with a wicked grin. “I’d just as lief smash him here as anywhere else.”

Walter promptly pulled off his own coat and waistcoat ; then he turned up his cuffs. Ned Chandler, his hand upon Walter’s arm, whispered advice, his blue eyes all the time fixed upon Barker.

“Watch him,” cautioned Ned. “Don’t let him get hold of you, or throw you, if you can help it. Stand off, and hit him back as he comes into you.”

Both of the young fellows were fully aware of the lawless nature of the combat

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into which Walter was about entering. Those were rough days ; and the river-men, the pioneers, adventurers and planters who used the great stream were rough men ; and so their ways of settling disputes were apt to be primitive. Force was what usually told ; the man who fought the most savage and relentless battle was almost invariably the victor. Skill was little considered, as is usually the case in the outposts of the world ; the man with the bulging muscles and the flail-like arms was the man figured on to conquer ; and now as young Jordan and Barker prepared for the fight there were few who considered that the former had a chance to escape being maimed.

“Barker’s like a bull,” said an interested river-man. “There’s no one between here and New Orleans that’s got a chance with him. He’ll eat this young fellow up.”

And the fact that the bullet-headed young man was considered the sure winner

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made him popular with a great number of the onlookers. That he was a noted bruiser had been passed about, and the crowd desired a specimen of his quality.

“Hurry up about it, Barker,” suggested a planter in a huge rimmed soft hat. “Don’t forget that the boat will be here only a quarter of an hour.”

“A quarter of an hour!” cried another. “Why, Barker’ll lick a half dozen like this fellow in that time.”

A loud laugh went up, and the rough throng gathered into a circle tighter than before.

“Sail into him, Bark,” advised one.

“Show him your mettle,” encouraged another.

“He’ll know better next time,” said a third.

“Barker’ll break his bones like matchsticks,” maintained a fourth.

One of those who stood gazing at the preparation for battle was a tall, raw-boned

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man of almost fifty, with a good-natured face, and a manner which was upon the verge of the eccentric. He wore a coon-skin cap, a long fringed hunting shirt of buckskin, leggings and tanned moccasins. In the hollow of his arm he carried a handsome rifle. He had been one of those who stood upon the wharf awaiting the tying of the "Mediterranean," apparently for the purpose of taking passage. But the crowd streaming over the rail had attracted his attention and he had followed.

"You all seem to set a sight of store on Barker," said this person, after he'd listened to the admiring remarks, and eager encouragement given the bruiser.

"Why not?" demanded a burly steamboat man, turning to the speaker. "He's beaten every man along the river."

The man in the hunting shirt laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh, come now," said he. "His record's

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not quite so good as that. What you mean is that he's beaten all he's fought ; but that doesn't say much. For fellows like Barker seldom pick a man they're not sure of."

" I take it," said the steamboat man, " that you've seen him fight."

" Lots of times," said the other, smiling. " In fact, anybody in the habit of seeing young Barker at all must have seen him fight. For it's the thing he's usually doing."

The planter with the wide-rimmed hat surveyed the man in the hunting shirt.

" I think," said he, " Barker's going to come out on top."

The backwoodsman fixed his keen eyes on Walter, who stood with his arms folded across his chest listening to Ned's last words. And then he smiled.

" Maybe," said he. " But if that youngster meets him right, he'll have no easy time of it."

And with this he worked his way through

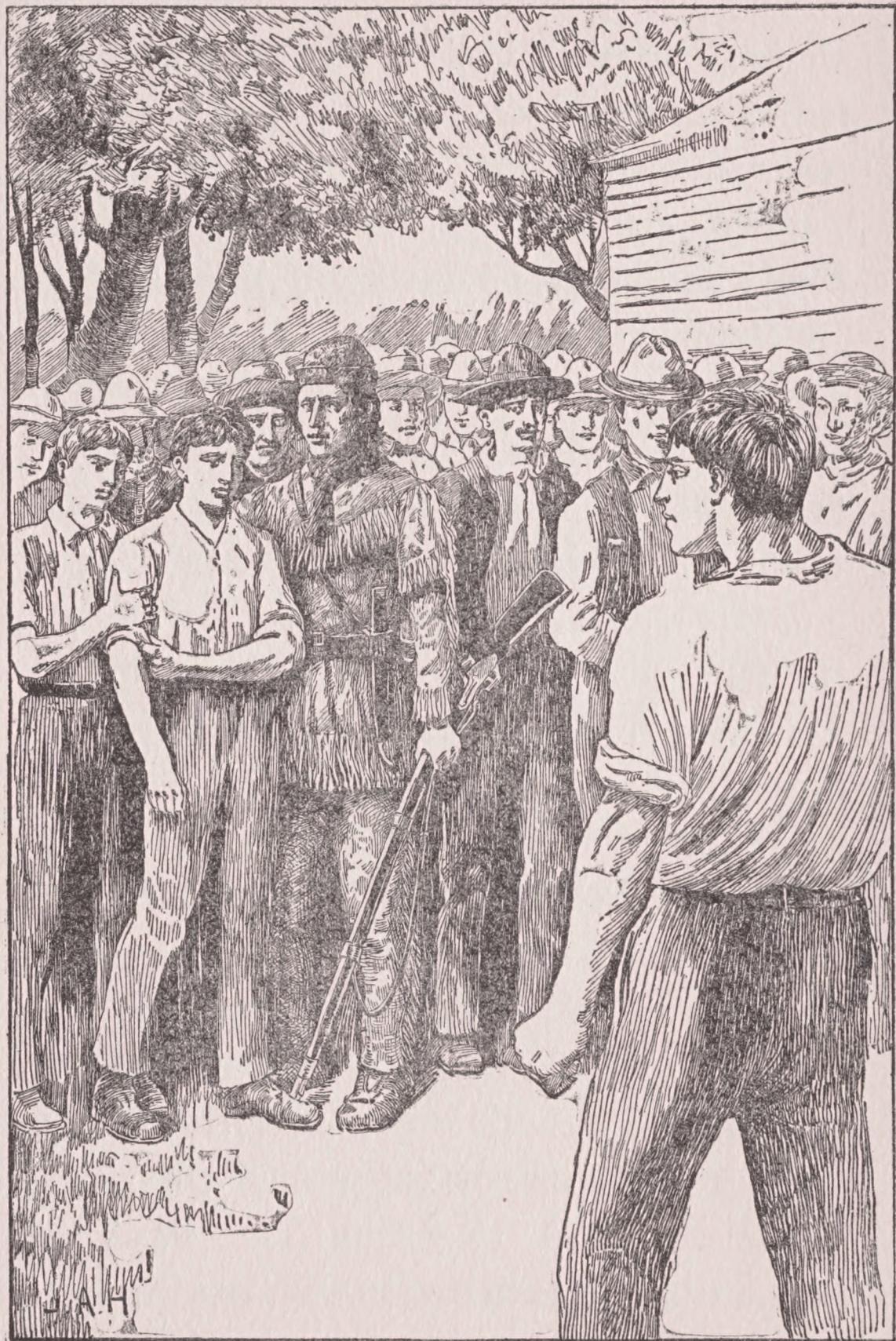
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the throng until he stood at Walter's side.

"Youngster," said he in a low voice, "here's a word of advice. Use your feet. Step around. And don't hit him around the face or head. You'll only hurt your hands, and do him no harm. Go for his body when you get the chance. He can't stand such blows, and anybody who can keep hitting him there can beat him."

Except for Ned's caution, "Don't let him cripple you," the words of the backwoodsman were the last that young Jordan heard before the battle opened.

He saw Barker advancing toward him, and stepped out to meet him. The bruiser held his arms awkwardly, his small round head was lowered, and coming within distance he leaped at his opponent without any ceremony. Swish ! swish ! went his short, powerful arms. Young Jordan allowed the first to swing by him and "ducked" under the other. Then his left



“DON’T LET HIM CRIPPLE YOU”

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went out, catching Barker flush in the mouth, and the right hand followed like a flash, landing on the bruiser's jaw.

However, though both had been strong blows, sufficient to have staggered most persons, Barker did not seem to regard them at all, but pressed on, his arms lunging and swinging wickedly. But both Jordan's hands felt the impact against the fellow's bony front, and as he stepped actively here and there avoiding the other's rushes and watching him narrowly, this thought formed itself in his mind :

“Whoever it was that just spoke to me seems to know what he was talking about as far as Barker's head and face go. They're like iron. And, so, if he was right in that, maybe he was right in the other thing. I'll give it a trial.”

A dozen times he had opportunities to land blows upon Barker's face, but he refused to strike. The ring of onlookers seized upon his disinclination and began to jeer.

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“ He’s afraid ! ” cried one.

“ Barker’s got him scared, so’s he dasn’t lift a hand.”

But the backwoodsman who had spoken to Walter smiled approvingly as he watched him.

“ Not too quick with your judgments, gentlemen,” said he. “ You’ll see something before long. Barker’s got some one at last who fights him in the right way.”

Like a bull, the bullet-headed bruiser lurched after his nimbly stepping opponent. His arms swung wildly and savagely. Suddenly grasping an opportunity, Walter stepped in and drove his right fist into the other’s short ribs. Barker’s heavy face twitched with pain, and he wavered for an instant. Then young Jordan’s left hand shot out and found a landing place in the pit of the bully’s stomach.

That these two blows had a serious effect was instantly evident. Barker’s face turned a sort of sickly gray and he shook his round

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head in a fury. But he had courage; and so once more he came on, thrashing out with his fists more awkwardly than before.

Ned Chandler, never missing a move of the two contestants, had seen the landing of Walter's blows with delight. But he also saw the tremendous power in the bully's awkward swings, and his pleasure was mingled with a fear that by some chance one of them would find a mark.

"Watch yourself, Walt," he kept repeating. "Don't let him get one of those in on you."

But Walter was careful, and he stepped about actively and with a purpose in every movement. Getting the bruiser into the right position he feinted him into a mad whirling of fists—then, one—two—the powerful body blows were driven home once more.

"That's it!" cried the tall backwoodsman, much pleased, and wearing a wide

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smile. "That's it! Keep it up, youngster. You'll bring him down like a coon out of a gum tree."

Barker flinched more under this second pair of blows than he had under the first. And his attack grew slacker.

"Now!" cried Ned Chandler. "Now, Walt, go in. This is your time."

"But keep up your guard!" cautioned the tall backwoodsman.

Walter dashed at his opponent. The fists of Barker whirled with ponderous inaccuracy; some of the blows struck Walter, some of them were glancing, others landed as he was stepping away, and so lost their power. None of them did any damage. But the blows which he was sending in, in return, were most effective. Sharp, straight and all directed at the body, few of them failed of their work. The gray of Barker's face increased; his knees began to tremble.

"Come on, Barker, do something," cried

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Colonel Huntley, furiously. "Are you going to let a fellow like that beat you?"

"Get your grapplers on him, Bark," suggested a river-man. "Get your grapplers on him, and let's see you twist him up like a pipe lighter."

Apparently Barker had been turning some such idea over in his own mind, for he at once set about putting it into play. Evidently he saw that, for all his power and reputation as a bully, he was no match for young Jordan in a stand-up fight. And so now he'd put his huge strength of body and arm to the test.

"That's right, Bark," encouraged the river-man. "That's it! Work in close!"

"Don't let him clinch you!" cried Ned Chandler, to his friend. "Hit him off!"

Such was Walter's intention. He had no desire to come to a grapple with a fighter of Barker's note; for in such a struggle, no matter who gained the victory, there would be a strong chance of severe injury.

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And that above everything else was what he wished to avoid. So, as Barker moved in, he was met with a shower of blows. But the bully had learned craft ; he did not attempt to strike back, but guarded with his arms crossed before him and with his head held low.

His small eyes were glaring between his arms and watching Walter with savage purpose. He made a move as though to the left ; young Jordan stepped aside to avoid him. But the thing had only been a feint, and as Walter moved, Barker shifted suddenly and the next instant his exultant clutch was upon his active foe.

“Now !” cried Colonel Huntley. “Now you’ve got him. Go to work !”

“Fight him off, Walt !” shouted Ned, his face paling a little at his friend’s danger.
“Fight him off.”

The ring of spectators was in a tumult. A turning point of the battle had been reached. Almost to a man they felt that

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the ruffianism of Barker would carry him through.

Once he felt the band-like arms of the bruiser close about him, Walter Jordan's plan of battle changed. He heard Ned's cry to fight the other off. But this was impossible. He felt Barker bracing himself for an effort, and he knew what it meant. Once the bully had thrown him to the ground he'd have him at his mercy; he would not be allowed to rise until he was helpless.

It required only a second or two for all this to pass through his mind; then he caught sight of the tall backwoodsman over Barker's shoulder. And that personage made a swift and suggestive motion with his arms.

“The elbow!” cried he. “Don’t forget the elbow!”

Instantly the young fellow understood. With a powerful wriggle he freed his right arm, and drove the elbow under the chin

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of Barker, pressing with all his might against the bruiser's throat.

"You fool!" shouted Huntley, to Barker.
"Don't let him do that!"

But it was too late. The more strongly Barker heaved and strained to throw young Jordan, the more deadly became the thrust of the elbow into his throat. And it was his own efforts that were doing it. Panting, purple of face, he realized this; to relieve the deadly pressure he would have to slip the grip he'd fought so hard to obtain, and trust to luck to secure another as good.

His arms unlocked; breathless, he attempted to step back for a moment's rest before plunging at his opponent once more. But here he received the surprise of his career as a Mississippi river bully. Instead of young Jordan's remaining upon the defensive as he had done almost from the start, he now leaped forward. His strong young arms pinned the breathless and momentarily helpless bruiser, and with a dex-

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terous twist lifted him from his feet. Then the fellow was hurled to the ground, where he lay breathless, almost unconscious, and absolutely defeated.

CHAPTER V

DAVY CROCKETT

As the ring of river-men, adventurers, planters and border characters closed in about the prostrate form of Barker, Walter Jordan felt a hand laid on his arm. Turning, he saw the tall backwoodsman at his side.

“They’ve got all the cargo on board the boat,” said the man, “and in a moment they’ll blow the whistle for every one to get back on board. There’ll be a rush ; and I reckon you’d better not be in it.”

Ned Chandler, who caught the words, understood their meaning instantly.

“That’s so,” said he, helping Walter on with his coat. “Barker seemed to have quite a number of friends in that crowd. And maybe one of them would try to get

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some sort of a sneaking revenge, Walt, if he saw a chance."

So, together with the stranger, they walked toward the end of the wharf. And as they stepped upon the deck of the "Mediterranean," her whistle shrieked a shrill warning. There was an instant rush of passengers ; and from the upper deck the three saw Barker helped on board by a couple of negroes.

"Colonel Huntley doesn't look any too well pleased," said Ned with a grin, as he caught sight of the sombre face of that gentleman. "His little plot was rather mussed up."

The tall backwoodsman looked interested.

"What's this?" said he. "Plot? Colonel Huntley?"

"The colonel," spoke Walter, "for an hour or two before the boat landed at Randolph spent his time in laying the foundation for a quarrel with me."

"He wanted to pick a fight," put in Ned.

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“He wanted to have Walt injured by that blackguard Barker so’s to prevent him from going to Texas.”

The long man’s interest deepened.

“So you are going to Texas, are you ? ” said he to young Jordan.

“We both are,” replied the latter.

“Might I ask what part ? ”

“San Antonio.”

The backwoodsman whistled.

“Well,” said he, “you’ve picked out what seems likely to be a mighty interesting section of the new country.”

Here the lines were cast off, and the “Mediterranean” steamed out into the stream ; then gathering headway she once more split the muddy waters on her journey southward. The battle upon the pier at Randolph was, for a time, the chief subject of conversation. But as Barker had retired to his stateroom, where his friends and some of the steamboat’s people were striving to make him presentable once more, and Wal-

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ter held to a corner of the upper deck with Ned and the stranger, making himself no more conspicuous than was necessary, the matter gradually died down, and finally almost completely ceased to be discussed.

A planter, who appeared to be a man of some consequence, appeared upon the deck with some friends; and catching sight of the stranger in the hunting shirt who stood talking with the two young travelers, he advanced with a surprised greeting.

“What, colonel! Going down the river?”

The man in the hunting shirt smiled in his good-natured way, and shook the planter’s hand cordially.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Burr,” said he. “Yes, going down the river. A little expedition, you see.”

“Gentlemen,” said the planter, addressing those who accompanied him, “shake hands with Colonel Crockett, the finest rifle shot, the greatest stump speaker and the most complete bear hunter in Tennessee.”

IN TEXAS

“Colonel Crockett,” said Walter to Ned as the backwoodsman laughingly shook hands with Mr. Burr’s friends. “Can it be the celebrated Davy Crockett of whom we’ve always heard so much?”

“I’ll bet it is,” said Ned, his eyes on the colonel. “I’ve seen pictures of him more than once; and they looked just as he does now.”

“How is it, Crockett,” asked Mr. Burr, “that I find you in your old back settlement togs, your rifle and hunting knife with you, headed south? Surely you are not going to Texas?”

Crockett nodded.

“Mr. Burr,” said he, “I surely am. Down there’s a new country to be fought for and freed. And down there I am going to give what help I can.”

“But,” protested Burr, “are you going to give up your career in Tennessee? You, as a member of Congress, have work to do.”

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Crockett laughed; and there was a trace of bitterness in it.

“As a member of Congress I *had* work to do,” corrected he. “But, you see, that’s an office that I no longer hold.”

The planter looked amazed.

“Why, you don’t mean to tell me you were defeated for reëlection in your district,” said he.

“I tell you just that,” said Colonel Crockett.

“Well, I’d never believed it,” said Burr, looking at his friends, wonder in his face.

“Why, colonel, you were the most popular candidate that ever stumped Tennessee.”

Davy Crockett smiled, good-naturedly.

“Yes; the boys set some store by me,” said he. “And they liked to hear me talk. But politics is a queer kind of thing. The man who gets the votes may not always win.”

Mr. Burr looked grave.

“Why,” said he, “I’m afraid that is true.”

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The party had settled themselves in chairs and the colonel addressed them generally.

“President Andy Jackson is no friend of mine,” said he. “I say this, mind you, knowing that Jackson is a perfectly honest man, a good friend to those who like him, and a fine fighter. But he’s no friend of mine; and that’s why I’m on my way to Texas to-day.”

“Jackson opposed your reëlection, then,” said one of the listeners.

“He opposed it early and late,” said the backwoodsman. “He fought me as hard as he could; and when you say that of Andy, why, you are saying that it was a pretty hefty battle. For he has the mettle and the backbone of the true fighter.”

There was a short pause; Colonel Crockett fingered the butt of his long rifle reminiscently and looked across the river toward the Arkansas shore.

“You see, I fought with Jackson against

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the British and against the Creeks, and I know him pretty well. But when I was a member of the Tennessee Legislature, there was a movement to beat John Williams for the United States senatorship. Williams had always done his work as well as a man could do it ; I didn't see any reason for not sending him back, and I said so. But they put up Jackson. And, although I then thought Andy the biggest man in the country, I voted against him, and so made him an enemy, along with his whole following. Chickens come home to roost," added the backwoodsman. "They remembered it against me, and they've fought me ever since."

"And," said Mr. Burr, "is this the reason you are leaving Tennessee—because your enemies have beaten you? Why not stay and fight them?"

The colonel cracked the joints of his strong fingers and smiled drolly.

"It doesn't put much into a man's life to

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spend it fighting people who should be his friends," said he. "At least, that's what I think. And, accordingly, here I am on my way to Texas to join Sam Houston and the rest against Santa Anna and his crew."

"There seems to be a strong tide set in toward that country," spoke another of the party. "I hear that there's hundreds go down the river every week."

"They'll be needed," nodded Colonel Crockett. "Everything looks promising for a long war; and Texas, so I've heard, is just the place where one can be carried out to any length by men who fight and run as the Mexicans do."

The talk between the men continued for some time; it was mainly about Texas and Crockett's political fortunes, and the boys listened with much interest. But finally Burr and his friends got up, and moved away to a place where some other people had gathered.

For some little time after this the back-

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woodsman sat nursing his rifle and gazing toward the wooded Arkansas shore. Finally he spoke.

“And so,” said he, “you have some kind of a difficulty with Colonel Huntley?”

“Yes, it would seem so,” replied Walter Jordan.

“I’ve known him for a good many years, off and on,” spoke Crockett. “Once he owned a big plantation in Carolina and worked a hundred slaves. Then he was interested in a steamboat company. But I heard some time ago that he’d lost all his money and was, so to speak, living by his wits.”

“That accounts for his being in the confidence of Sam Davidge, then,” said Ned Chandler, to his friend. “I guess Sam has hired Huntley, and Huntley hired Barker.”

Walter laughed.

“Suppose,” said he, “that Barker would now take it into his head to hire some

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one. Why, the thing might go on that way and there would be no end to our enemies."

Ned joined in the laugh at this idea ; but at the same time he shook his head.

"But the matter's no joke," said he. "They mean business, and will try in every way they know to prevent our carrying out your father's plans."

The name and fame of Davy Crockett, rifleman, bear hunter, backwoods philosopher, had traveled at that time into every corner of the United States. He was spoken of at every fireside, and his homely wisdom and basic honesty were admitted by all. Walter Jordan knew this, and as he sat gazing at the man, whose face was at once droll, shrewd and fearless in expression, an idea occurred to him.

"Here is a man," he told himself, "who has put himself out of his way to be my friend. And he's just the kind of a man whose advice would be worth following

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and whose help would be worth having in the adventure we are now started upon."

He leaned over toward Ned, and whispered :

"Don't you think it would be a good thing to tell Colonel Crockett about our affair, and hear what he has to say?"

"Good," approved young Chandler at once. "Do it."

So Walter turned toward the backwoodsman.

"Colonel Crockett," said he, "if you have the time to listen, and are willing, I'd like to tell you the story."

Crockett turned his shrewd eyes upon the boy and nodded.

"All right, youngster," said he. "Go ahead."

Thereupon Walter related the story of the journalist, Tom Norton; of his going to Texas with his wife and daughter; how both he and his wife died at San Antonio,

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leaving the girl an orphan. Then came the matter of the fortune left the girl.

“It was an uncle of her father’s who willed it to her,” said Walter. “He was an odd sort of an old man, and had for his lawyer his only other relative, one Sam Davidge, who is known throughout Kentucky as a double-dealer and a man who does not stop at small things to gain his ends.”

“I’ve heard of him,” said Crockett.

“But the old man finally dropped Davidge. My father never knew why, but suspects he found him out in some dishonest work. Davidge had been named as executor to the estate; but the old gentleman now altered this. In a sort of codicil, my father was named as executor. When the old gentleman died some few weeks ago, Davidge set up a claim that he had been influenced, that he was of weak mind when the codicil was attached to the will.”

Then the young fellow related the nature

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of his trip to Texas ; of Davidge's following him, and of the appearance of Colonel Huntley and Barker upon the scene. And Crockett listened to it all with much attention, nodding his head at points well made, and putting in a helpful word here and there.

When Walter had finished, the colonel lay back in his chair in a careless, lounging fashion and spoke.

“ Their idea is, as you say, to reach the girl first,” said he, “ and to let them do that would be dangerous. Of course they may mean only to influence her ; but then, again, they may mean worse.”

“ You don’t mean——” but Walter was afraid to finish the sentence.

Crockett nodded.

“ That is *just* what I mean,” said he. “ Davidge is the only other relative, you say. Well, if the girl never appeared in Louisville, Davidge would come into the money.”

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Both boys were appalled by this; but at length Walter said:

“Knowing the matter, Colonel Crockett, and understanding what these men are after, what would you advise us to do?”

Crockett stroked the stock of the handsome rifle upon his knee.

“Do?” said he, and he smiled drolly. “Why, that’s simple enough, youngster. Get to San Antonio first; tell the girl the facts, and leave it to her to decide whether she’ll go north with you and your friend here, or with Huntley and the legal shark. If you talk to her right and get her ear first, I’ve got no doubt about the result.”

Walter Jordan smiled.

“You seem to lay great stress on the importance of being first,” he said.

Crockett nodded.

“And why not?” said he, his shrewd eyes upon the boy. “There’s an old saying, ‘The first blood’s half the battle!’ And it’s as true a one as was ever put into

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words. I found it out years ago in the wilderness among the redskins and the prowling varmints. Let them act first and you had an almighty job getting the best of them. But be sharp and watchful—strike the first blow, and the rest was pretty easy."

Walter looked puzzled.

"But," said he, "Colonel Huntley is on board this boat; he'll arrive at New Orleans as quickly as we shall. There's nothing that I know of to hinder his pressing on to San Antonio with as much speed as we can make—perhaps more."

"That's true enough," said Crockett. "In the natural course of things he might get better mounts than you boys, and so cross the Injun country ahead of you. But," with a quizzical look in his eye, "why let things take their natural course? That's what the fellow does who picks out a shady place under a tree—he lets things take care of themselves. But that kind of

IN TEXAS

proceeding never got any wood split. Interfering with the natural course of things is what we call work ; and work is the thing that gets results.”

“But,” said Ned Chandler, “just how shall we go to work to win, in this matter, do you think ?”

“Why not take a leaf from Huntley’s book ?” suggested Crockett. “He had the right kind of a notion. He wanted to stop you from getting into Texas. So why not do the same thing for him—only in another way ?”

“Good !” Walter Jordan slapped Ned upon the back with a force that made that young gentleman cough. “That’s it. We’ll carry the war into Africa, and give Davidge, Huntley and Co. a dose of their own medicine.”

CHAPTER VI

BEAR HUNTING

GRADUALLY it became known throughout the "Mediterranean" that the celebrated Davy Crockett was on board, and it was seldom, from then on, that the genial backwoodsman was not at the center of a knot of laughing friends, old and new, who listened to his stories and jokes, and encouraged him to give them more of the same kind.

But, one evening, as he sat out upon the deck with Walter Jordan and Ned Chandler near by, the planter, Mr. Burr, induced him to tell of one of his hunting exploits.

"Give us a bear hunting story, colonel," suggested the planter. "It's been a long time since I heard you tell one."

Crockett shook his head.

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“There’ll come a time, and it’s mighty near at hand,” said he, “when bear stories in this part of the world will be few enough. The bear is going fast, and I reckon he’ll sing his death song, in Tennessee anyhow, in the next ten years.”

“But there were lots of them some years ago,” encouraged Mr. Burr.

“Heaps,” said Crockett. “I’ve been into the Tennessee wilderness where their tracks were pretty plenty. And there was good hunting, fresh meat to be smoked and salted away for winter, and furry pelts to keep out the cold of the ground when a fellow went to sleep. Yes, there was fine hunting, and lots of bears and panthers and deer and fur animals beyond counting, in the woods and along the streams.

“I remember once,” said he, continuing, “that I had a dream of a nigger; and when I dreamed of a nigger that always meant—bear! So off I sets with a couple of dogs, my rifle and a good horn of powder and

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plenty of ball. It'd been raining all the night before ; then it had turned cold, and the rain changed to sleet.

“ ‘Good bear weather,’ says I to myself. ‘I ought to get a whopper.’

“ The sleet was bad and stung my face almost to bleeding ; but I thought of the bear that I was sure was waiting for me somewhere, and so I held on. But I'd tramped a half dozen miles and the only thing the dogs turned up was a flock of turkeys ; I got a couple of big ones, and sat down on the end of a log to rest, for the tramp had played me out.

“ But I hadn't sat there long before I noticed that one of the dogs, an old hound, was acting rather excited. He was sniffing around as though he'd got scent of something. Then he put his nose in the air, and let out a yowl that brought me up with rifle ready.

“ Off starts the hounds, and me after them. They seemed to have struck the

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trail of something and hung to it like good fellows. A couple of times they lost the scent, and I made up my mind each time that the varmint, whatever it was, had them licked ; but they picked it up again and were off once more as good as ever.

“ The woods were pretty thick,” proceeded Crockett, “ and the two old hounds seemed to pull me through the worst of it ; and with two big gobblers on my back, I had all I could do to keep up with them. But suddenly there was a sort of clearing—a natural one—and right there I saw the biggest black bear I’d ever seen in Tennessee !

“ The hounds stood as close to him as they dared to go ; the hair on their backs was standing as stiff as brushes ; and they were yelping all the names at him that they could lay their tongues to.

“ A black bear won’t pay much attention to hounds. But they are kind of shy of men being around—especially men with

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rifles in their hands. It may be that the daddy of all the bears has handed it down that a man with a rifle is a thing to be afraid of. Anyway, when this black fellow got sight of me, he turns to and breaks for a thicket which was close by. In after him went the hounds ; and after the hounds went I. It was as dense a growth, that thicket, as any I'd ever seen, and I had to squirm through it ; also it was hard to see far through the growth, and so I had to trust to the dogs to tell me when the bear was close at hand."

"Tight work," observed Mr. Burr.

"It just was," replied Colonel Crockett. "But it wasn't long before I heard a noise ahead ; and there was the bear climbing an oak tree. When he reached a good heavy branch he stopped, got out on it and turned. Then he began to look around for me. And now I had a chance to get another look at him, and still I felt he was the biggest bear I'd ever seen in those woods. If I'd had a

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scale along and could have induced him to get on them I'll venture the critter'd weighed an easy six hundred pounds.

“ I was less than a hundred yards from him, and to make sure of my shot I reprimed my gun. Then I drew a bead on him and fired.”

“ Did you get him ? ” asked Ned Chandler, who had been listening intently.

“ Not then. The bullet must have hit him somewhere, though, for he gave a kind of a yawp ; but he looked none the worse, and went on sticking to the limb of the oak. So I rammed home another charge of powder and ball, primed as carefully as I could, and let him have it again. This time the shot counted. He fell out of the tree with a yell, his big paws going like mad, and his red mouth wide open. One of the hounds forgot his training and rushed in on him, thinking he was a goner.

“ But that black fellow had lots of fight in him still. He scooped the hound up

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as a squirrel scoops up a nut; and he hugged him tight. The hound yowled something scandalous; and his comrade barked fit to split. As they were down on the ground through this part of the affair I couldn't see much of them because of the denseness of the thicket. But, thinking I was about to lose a pretty fair kind of a hound, I dropped my rifle, drew my knife and tomahawk, and with one in one hand, and one in the other, I broke my way toward the place of action."

"I suppose there wasn't much left to the hound by that time," said Burr.

"Oh, yes. He'd lots of life in him, for he yelled like a whole pack. You see the bear hadn't got a proper pressure on him, and he was just shifting his grip when I busts through the thicket. And no sooner had I showed my nose than Mr. Bear seemed to understand that he'd been blaming his misfortunes on the wrong party. Right away he knew it wasn't the hound

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that had tumbled him out of the tree, but me.

“ And so, quick as a wink, he dropped the dog, and gave his attention to me. Now the knife I had in my left hand was a good enough knife, as such things go ; and the hatchet was a fair kind of a weapon. But when I looked at them and then at that six hundred pounds of bear, they looked foolish ; and so back I went, with all the speed I could get up, to the place where I had dropped my rifle.

“ I picked it up, and saw, or rather heard, the bear coming for me ; and as I was about to lift the piece to my shoulder, to wait for him, it struck me that it wasn’t loaded. I’ve done some quick pouring of powder in my time, but I think that was the quickest I ever undertook. I pulled the stopper from my powder horn and let the charge run into the barrel of that old rifle without paying much attention to how much, then I rammed it home, and the bul-

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let, too, and then primed as carefully as I could under the circumstances.

“Along came the black bear, wounded, growling and as mad as tarnation. And up went the rifle, and I fired. Down went the critter on his side ; he gave a couple of kicks and was dead.”

“Quite an experience,” said Mr. Burr. “Suppose you had, in your hurry, loaded your rifle improperly and it had missed fire. What would you have done ?”

“Run,” said Crockett, promptly ; “run as fast as my legs could carry me. A wounded bear is no kind of a beast to stand and reason with.”

“What did you do with him after you got him ?” asked Ned Chandler.

“Well, as he was all of six hundred pounds, I couldn’t do much myself. So I got back to my cabin as quick as I could, got some friends and some horses, and we started out to find the carcass. I’d blazed the way with my tomahawk, and we hadn’t

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much trouble in coming to the place. Then we dressed the critter, loaded the meat on the horses' backs and took it home."

The genial hunter told many quaint and stirring tales of his experiences in the Indian wars, in the deep forests of the southwest, and of the wild and dangerous animals with which those forests were overrun. The lawless character who is always to be found on the outskirts of civilization also came into his conversation.

"Wherever you go in the southwest country, you run across him," said Colonel Crockett. "He's to be found in every settlement, in every camp, traveling every trail. He's always armed, he's usually got courage, he never fails to cause trouble."

"I've met that sort of fellow myself," nodded the planter, Burr. "He's to be avoided."

But Crockett shook his head.

"Not always," said he. "The fact that people give him the width of the trail in

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passing is one of the things that encourages him to go even further than he'd gone before. That kind of a fellow should always be shown his proper place. He should be opposed when he makes a move to interfere with the rights of others."

Just then there was a clatter of chairs on the deck and looking around Walter Jordan saw Huntley and a sharp-faced man dressed in black.

"Hello!" said Ned Chandler in a low tone to Walter, "there's Sam Davidge now."

"He's seen that it's no use hiding any longer," said Walter; "and now he's come out in the open. But," his eyes on the two men, "I wonder what they're up to?"

"No good, I'll say that," said Ned, with a promptness that made Walter smile.

The two men made way for themselves among the chairs; and when they had reached the party of which Crockett and the boys were members, they paused.

"How are you, Mr. Burr?" cried Hunt-

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ley, with great cordiality. "I thought I saw you on board to-day."

"How do you do, sir?" said Burr, who did not seem at all sure who Huntley was. "I'm pleased to see you again."

"I met you—in Nashville, I think it was. Abe Sterrit, I think, introduced us," said Huntley, seeing that Burr was not certain of him.

The planter's face fell; and Crockett chuckled at the sight.

"Abe Sterrit's a horse jockey at Nashville," whispered the backwoodsman to Ned, a wide grin upon his face. "And I don't think Mr. Burr sets much store by him."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the planter to Huntley, "I think I remember you. I trust you've been well, sir."

"Tolerable," said Huntley. Then, looking at Crockett, "How are you, colonel?"

"Good-evening," replied the backwoodsman.

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"Haven't seen you since you were electioneering for your second term in Congress," said the man.

"I don't think I've run across you, either," said Crockett, evenly. "But I remember seeing you then, well enough. You were making speeches right and left against me."

Huntley laughed loudly.

"Ah, well, colonel," said he, "it's these little differences of opinion that make life worth living. I did work against you, that's a fact, but because I was of opposite beliefs, and not through any sort of ill will."

Crockett smiled drolly.

"Have it your own way," said he.

Huntley seemed especially earnest; he took a step nearer to the backwoodsman.

"I've always felt a strong regard for your type of man, Colonel Crockett," said he. "And I've always had a strong regard for your work and aims. And," here he

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cast a swift glance in the direction of the boys, "I mean to prove that to you, right now."

Walter nudged Ned with his elbow.

"I see it coming," whispered Ned in return. "It's something about us."

Crockett, with the droll smile still upon his face, replied to Huntley :

"Well, I'm a sight obliged for your interest, sir."

"It's come to my ears," said Huntley, "that you are going to Texas."

"Well, that's the plain truth," replied Crockett. "But what is there against that?"

"Nothing," answered the man, hastily. "That is, nothing against that in itself. But I understand, colonel, that you mean to accompany these two young men to San Antonio upon a certain mission —"

"Eh?" cried Colonel Crockett.

He looked in amazement at the speaker and then at the two boys.

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“This is the first time I’ve heard of it,” said he.

But Huntley disregarded the statement, evidently not believing it.

“I take this occasion to warn you,” he went on, “that you are being deceived. The errand of these two young men to San Antonio is not at all the sort of thing they claim. As a matter of fact, it’s just the reverse. They are engaged in a piece of obvious rascality, and it is only right that you should know it before you get into it too far.”

Here the sharp-faced man in the black clothes stepped forward.

“My name is Davidge, Colonel Crockett,” said he. “Samuel Davidge; and I’m a councilor at law, in Louisville. It is possible that you have heard of me.”

“Yes,” replied the backwoodsman, and there was a world of significance in his look and tone, “I have heard of you—often!”

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His meaning was so plain that some in the party laughed outright. Davidge swallowed once or twice; but he was a man hardened to affront and he went on without a change of tone.

“There is a conspiracy in progress, and these two boys are participators in it. They have, no doubt, told you some cock-and-bull story as to why they are going to Texas. But, believe me, sir, they are deceiving you. If you will give me a few moments I will inform you as to the true facts, and let you know in plain words —”

But here he was interrupted by Davy Crockett suddenly arising to his feet, sending his chair tipping over with an angry kick as he did so.

“Look here, Mr. Davidge,” said he. “Before you go any further in this talk of yours I want to say this to you, and,” his eyes going to Huntley, “to you also. These two boys have struck me as being of good mettle. They stick to what they

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set out to do, and they are willing to fight for what they believe is right. I've got the whole story from them of why they are going to Texas — ”

“ A pack of lies ! ” cried Huntley.

“ Take care, Colonel Crockett,” warned Davidge. “ Take care. They are sharp, young as they are. They'll lead you into trouble.”

“ Well,” said Crockett, and he turned a quaint smile upon Walter and Ned, “ I've been in trouble before now, and I guess I can take care of myself, and get out of it again, if they get me in. As to their being sharpers and telling me a pack of lies, I take leave to doubt it. But they *have* told me of your little scheme, Mr. Davidge,” nodding to the sharp-faced man, “ and of how you crept on board this boat in secret pursuit of them. And of you, Huntley,” to the burly man, “ and your hiring a bruiser to injure one of them and so prevent him from finishing his journey. And I do be-

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lieve that, for it's about the kind of thing you'd both be likely to do."

"Sir," cried Davidge, with dignity, "you are insulting!"

"Take care!" spoke Huntley, his face turning a deep red as he strove to control himself.

"But," went on Crockett, "there has been no understanding between these youngsters and myself about going to San Antonio with them. That little bit of steamboat gossip, if you really heard such, is not true. However," and the droll smile came into his face once more, and he nodded his head shrewdly, "now that the thing's been suggested to me, it wouldn't be a half bad idea. I've got lots of time on my hands, and the freedom of Texas can wait a bit longer. I *will* go to San Antonio de Bexer with these youngsters, and I'd like to see any man, black, white or red, lay another straw in their way!"

CHAPTER VII

SURPRISING NEWS

DAVID CROCKETT, as is well known, was a man of eccentric manner and character; and eccentric people are given to whims and caprices. And it was one of these latter which gave Walter Jordan and Ned Chandler most invaluable aid.

“Do you mean it, Colonel Crockett?” asked Ned, after Huntley and Davidge had gone away, and the deck party was breaking up.

“I do,” answered the backwoodsman, in his downright way. “If I’ll not be a hindrance to you, and can help in any way, count on me.”

Needless to say the boys warmly assured him that he’d be of the greatest help to them.

“With you to post us on what to do,” said

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Walter, "we'll have no trouble at all in the new country."

Crockett smiled.

"Well, you know," said he, "I've had no experience there myself."

"But you've been in places that were pretty similar," said Walter. "It'll not be new to you."

The boys were in high feather all the way down the river ; any fear they might have had of Huntley and his friends left them ; with so noted a fighting man as Davy Crockett as a companion, they felt that they were safe from the attempts of even the most hardy.

Huntley and his comrades seemed also to feel something of this ; the lads now rarely saw them on deck ; they kept themselves close, and did nothing to interfere with the young travelers, neither in look, word, nor act.

"But, somehow," observed Ned Chandler, "I can't think that they've forgotten us."

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“They haven’t,” replied Walter. “They are keeping us in mind, right enough. Only from now on they are going to be less open in what they do.”

Steadily upon her course down the broad, yellow Mississippi steamed the “Mediterranean.” She stopped at many places to take on or put off cargo or passengers; and Crockett, so it seemed, was constantly meeting old friends and making speeches to gatherings which came together to cheer him at wharves and landing places. The whole country, so it seemed as they got further south, was aflame at the idea of Texas and Mexico engaging in a conflict. And that such a popular and picturesque personage as Crockett should be on his way to take part in the struggle greatly added to the excitement.

Everything proceeded without any stirring events, except those noted, until the boat drew in at the mouth of the White River and Crockett encountered an old

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friend and fellow keeper of the border, Captain William Cumby.

“Dave,” said Cumby, as he shook the backwoodsman’s hand, “I haven’t seen you in years; and I’m ‘tarnal glad of the chance to do it now, old boy.”

They conversed for some little time and Crockett introduced his young friends.

“All going to Texas, eh?” said Cumby, after he had favored each of the lads with a hand-shake which was like the grip of a vise. “Well, if it’s entertainment you’re looking for, you’ll find it in plenty, youngsters. A friend of mine just came up from there and he tells me things are biling to such a degree that they’ve got considerable trouble keeping the lid on the pot half the time.”

A small, elderly man with a parchment face and many deep wrinkles was tying a pair of horses to a fence some little distance away. Captain Cumby called to him.

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"Here, Dolph," said he. "I want you to shake hands with Davy Crockett."

Dolph looked interested.

"Not *the* Davy Crockett?" said he.

"That very same gentleman," answered Captain Cumby.

Dolph approached and gripped Crockett's hand.

"Colonel," said he, "I'm glad to see you. I've heard of you for years and ain't never had the pleasure of setting eyes on you before."

"Dolph," said Cumby, after he'd introduced the boys to the old man, "they are all on their way to Texas."

Dolph shook his head.

"I know Texas," said he. "I've lived there for fifteen years, off and on ; and it's a fine country. But it's pizen just now ; and unless you're going there for a special purpose, such as helping to fight old Santa Anna, or such, I'd advise you to keep away."

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Captain Cumby laughed.

"Dolph don't believe in strangers going into Texas without being warned," laughed Captain Cumby. "But he's going back himself in a day or two."

"I know what's to be expected," stated the old man, who evidently was hardy and had many years of border experience. "And I belong down there. And when the fighting starts once more I want to be in it."

"How comes it," asked Crockett, "that you left just when things was a-shaping themselves for the big smash-up?"

"I had to," replied Dolph. "Just plumb had to. It all come of me being in the party that went with Colonel Milan to attack San Antonio."

"So you were with that lot!" said Crockett.

Dolph nodded.

"And I never want to see a worse organized gathering of white men," said

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he. "They'd come together from all parts of Texas and the southwest, thinking that war was to start at once. The lot of them moved toward San Antonio, and were then halted. As we didn't attack, they got disgusted, and the whole crowd was just melting away. Burleson was at the head of the force, and one night he made up his mind to retreat. This almost brought on a mutiny among those who were left. And so then Colonel Milan goes to Burleson and asks permission to call for volunteers to attack the town. And Burleson gave it.

"Then the colonel jumped out in front of the crowd of men, who were just biling with vexation, and waves his hat.

"'Who'll go with old Ben Milan into San Antonio?' shouts he.

"And in a minute the lot of them were around him and shouting like mad. Well, we attacked the town, and after a long fight from street to street, and house to house, we

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beat the greasers. But right in the middle of it whom should I run across but an American girl, who was living with a Spanish family in one of the houses which we broke into."

"An American girl!" Walter Jordan gazed at the speaker eagerly, and then turned his glance upon Ned.

"Who was she?" asked the latter of Dolph.

"She hadn't an American friend nearer than New Orleans," said the old man. "I found that out next day. We didn't know what to do with her; but after putting our heads together, the officers made up their minds to send her with a family party which was headed northeast, and they sent me as guide. I left her a month ago, safe and sound, with friends at New Orleans."

"What was her name?" insisted Ned Chandler.

Dolph looked puzzled.

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“It was Ethel,” said he, scratching his head. “But consarn me if I can think of the other name.”

“Norton,” suggested Walter.

“That’s right!” said Dolph. Then, in surprise: “But how’d you know it?”

“Wait,” said Davy Crockett.

Walter halted in the answer he was about to make.

“Don’t look around,” said Crockett. “But I see that sneaking fellow Davidge watching us from the upper deck.”

The place where the little party stood upon the wharf was in the great shadow cast by the “Mediterranean” as she lay at her moorings; and by a sly glance upward, Ned Chandler saw the black-clad, sharp-faced lawyer leaning over the rail of the boat, and evidently doing his best to hear what was being said.

At once, though with an assumption of carelessness, they walked up the wharf, and when out of hearing and also out of sight

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behind some bales of cotton, they began to question the old Texan.

In a few moments they were convinced of the welcome fact that Ethel Norton, the girl whom they were going to San Antonio to seek, was in New Orleans.

“It looks,” said Ned Chandler, to Walter, “that all we’ve got to do now is to keep on board the boat until she reaches New Orleans. It’s turned out no kind of a job at all.”

“Dad will be delighted,” said Walter. “We’ll have her in Louisville on the next up-river boat.”

“Don’t hurry your horses,” said Colonel Crockett, who seemed to be turning the situation over in his mind. “If you do, you’ll wear them out.”

The boys looked at him quickly, for there was something in his voice which caught their attention.

“There is one thing that’s sure,” said the backwoodsman, “and that is that Davidge

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and Huntley will keep you youngsters in view until they see you have set out for San Antonio. If you stick to the 'Mediterranean' all the way down the river, they will too. At New Orleans they'll follow you; they'll find out that the girl is there. And so you'll lose all the advantage which Dolph's information has given you."

The point of this argument was plain to both boys.

"What do you think we'd best do?" asked Walter.

"I have a plan," said the backwoodsman.
"Let me carry it out for you."

Both lads agreed eagerly.

"Very well," said Colonel Crockett, smiling in his droll way. Then to Captain Cumby and the old Texan, "Wait here a bit for us. We'll be back."

With the two boys he started toward the "Mediterranean."

"Now," said he in a low tone as they went, "you are to order out your baggage as

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coolly as you please. Try and make it look as though you'd intended leaving the boat at this place from the first."

When they reached the boat, the boys did as directed ; they had their belongings in the clumsy traveling bags of that period, and they got them out on deck and down the gangplank—Crockett doing the same. When they reached the place where Captain Cumby and Dolph awaited them, Crockett said humorously :

"Cumby, you ain't got no kind of knowledge of what's going on yet. But keep a stiff upper lip, and just do what you're told, and we'll post you by and by."

Looking around the edge of the cotton bales, Ned Chandler saw the hurrying forms of Huntley and Davidge and Barker, baggage in hand, hurrying down the plank from the steamboat. Reporting this to Crockett, the latter laughed as one well pleased, and then said to the old Texan :

"Dolph, see if you can get us some kind

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of a trap for ourselves and our belongings. Captain Cumby, if you don't mind," to that astonished gentleman, "we'll pay a little visit to your plantation, and if you treat us well, we may stay there for a couple of days."

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE JOKE

THE Texan secured a conveyance, and Crockett and the two boys, with their baggage, tumbled in. Captain Cumby and Dolph mounted their horses, and away they went along the dirt road that led from the river. The last sight they had of Davidge and his friends, they were standing upon the wharf eagerly questioning some negroes and pointing after the wagon.

“They’ll know where we’re going,” said Ned to Crockett.

The backwoodsman nodded.

“So they will, youngster,” said he. “And that’s what I calculate on their doing.”

Once at the huge farm, or plantation of Captain Cumby, that genial gentleman

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made them feel at home ; and then, after a splendid dinner in which game and fish from the streams formed a part, Crockett took both Cumby and Dolph aside and plunged at once into a long, low-voiced conversation.

The two boys sitting comfortably in the two big cane chairs heard a series of chuckles and guffaws from the three.

“ The colonel’s got some sort of a joke on foot,” said Ned.

“ And it’s about this matter of ours,” said Walter. “ He’s hiding it from us, because I can see he wants to make it a surprise.”

That night as the host, Crockett and the two boys were sitting quietly together in the captain’s big living-room, the young fellows listening to the stories of the veterans, Dolph entered, a broad smile upon his wrinkled, tanned face.

“ Well, colonel,” said he, to Crockett, “ you’re a cute one. They did just what you said they’d do.”

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Captain Cumby gave a shout of laughter.

“What!” cried he. “Were you talking to them, Dolph?”

Dolph nodded, still grinning gleefully.

“According to instructions,” said he, “I just took to hanging around a fence corner. And by and by a stranger comes up the road—one of the men I see leave the steamboat in such a hurry. And he gets me in conversation about the country. I told him I thought Arkansas was a great place, but that I was going to take the trail back to Texas to-morrow at sundown. He perked up at that and got almighty interested.

“‘Back to Texas?’ says he.

“‘Yes,’ says I.

“‘That’s a mighty long journey to take alone,’ says he, cunningly enough.

“‘It would be if I was going alone,’ says I.

“‘Oh,’ says he, ‘somebody’s going along with you.’

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“‘Three of them,’ says I. ‘We’re off for San Antonio to-morrow night.’

“‘How are you going?’ asks he, very innocent like.

“‘Oh, horseback to the Red River. Then down that on a boat to Natchitoches. Then horseback across Texas.’”

Crockett was vastly amused at this repetition of the conversation between Dolph and the man at the fence corner; both he and Captain Cumby laughed and slapped their knees. And now, for the first time, the boys got a glimpse of the backwoodsman’s intent.

“I think I see what you mean to do,” said Ned Chandler, eagerly. “You intend throwing them off the scent by letting them think we are going on to Texas.”

“And they’ll be on their way there, while we are steaming down toward New Orleans,” put in Walter, well pleased.

“That’s about the size of it,” said Colonel Crockett. “But to succeed we can’t let it

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rest as it lies. We must do something further; for they are pretty cute and not of the sort that fly off on a thing without feeling as sure as they can that it's all right."

But just what further step he meant to take the colonel didn't say; apparently he enjoyed the suspense and excitement of the boys as much as he did the joke on Huntley and his companions.

Next day the boys spent in riding over the country with Crockett and Captain Cumby and interviewing a number of gentlemen who were interested in recruiting men and forwarding war material down the Red River to be used in the Texans' war with Mexico. They arrived at Cumby's plantation once more in about the middle of the afternoon; after supper they sat and talked of the doings of the day, and the prospects of success for Texas. Then Dolph entered.

"The whole lot of them's snooping

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around and waiting," said he. "And they've got their horses down the trail a piece."

Crockett chuckled.

"All right, Dolph," said he. "You might as well get our mounts ready. And then we'll be off."

In a half hour there came a clatter of hoofs outside.

"Now, youngsters," said Crockett, "just do what I do; and say what I say, and ask no questions."

They followed him outdoors. He had his long rifle across his back; his knife and hatchet were in his belt. The boys were attired, at Crockett's request, as though for a long journey.

Dolph sat astride a tall horse and held three others by the bridles. Crockett climbed into the saddle of one and the boys mounted the others. Slowly they rode down the path to the trail, Captain Cumby walking at the side of Crockett.

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And when they reached the trail they drew rein.

“Well, Cumby,” said Davy Crockett, “I’ll bid you good-bye.” He spoke in a loud voice and leaned over in his saddle and shook the captain’s hand. “Texas is a long way off and war is mighty uncertain, so I don’t know if we’ll meet again or no.”

“Anyway, colonel,” said Cumby, “take care of yourself. Do all you can for Texas, but don’t forget to keep an eye out for yourself.”

“Good-bye, Captain Cumby,” said Walter Jordan, also shaking their host by the hand.

“Good-bye, youngster,” returned the captain, genially. “And you, too, boy,” to Ned. “Good luck to you.”

And so, with a call from Dolph to the captain, and a chorus of good-byes from all, they shook their reins and set off along the westward trail. A mile from the Cumby place Crockett said :

“Halt!”

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They all drew up; the backwoodsman got down from his nag, and, stooping, laid his ear to the trail. Then he remounted once more, and the boys heard him laugh.

“They are coming,” said he. “I heard them pounding along at a good smart pace.”

For at least two miles further they kept to the trail, their horses going at an easy lope. Then at a word from Crockett they left it, and drew up in the deep shadows of a thick grove. Fifteen minutes later three horsemen appeared, their nags going at a sharp trot, and their voices lifted in conversation.

“They’ll probably hold to this trail till they get to Hamlin,” said the voice of Huntley. “We’ll leave it and strike straight across country and so beat them to the river. If we can get a boat ahead of them we might get into San Antonio three days in advance.”

Davidge was replying to this when the distance became too great for the listeners

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to hear. Fainter and fainter grew the hoof beats on the soft trail, and finally they died away altogether.

“ Well,” said Davy Crockett, and the boys noted a pleased chuckle in his voice, “ now that we’ve seen them well on their way, youngsters, suppose we mount once more and ride back to Captain Cumby’s. He’ll be expecting us.”

CHAPTER IX

TEXAS

IT was a few days after this little hoax practiced on the sharpers by Colonel Crockett that the steamboat "General Morgan" tied up at the wharf and Walter Jordan and Ned Chandler got on board.

"This'll get you into New Orleans in a little while," said the genial backwoodsman as he shook hands with them. "And like as not you'll get your business over and be on your way home before I leave this section."

"You'll stay a while, then," said Walter. "Cumby tells me it'll be to my advantage," said Crockett. "They are raising money to put a regiment into the Texan service, and he thinks I ought to join it."

"Then," said Ned, "as we come up the

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river we'll stop off and see if you're still around."

"Good!" cried Crockett, and he shook hands with them again. "Do that, sure. And I'll be glad to see you."

When the "General Morgan" steamed out into the river, they saw him waving his coonskin cap to them; and they stood at the rail as long as they could see the wharf, replying.

"Now that," said Ned, putting his hat firmly upon his head, "is one of the finest men I ever saw."

"I think so, too," said Walter. "He'd do anything to serve any one he took a fancy to, or any one in need of help."

The "General Morgan" was one of the swiftest steamers on the river; and it was not a great while before the boys found themselves in the city of New Orleans. Here the war rumors from Texas were thicker than further up the river. The recruiting of volunteers was openly going

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on. Upon posts and dead walls were loud sounding placards calling for volunteers. All this interested the boys greatly; but they were naturally still more interested in the finding of Ethel Norton.

The address given them by Dolph was not at all difficult to locate. But when they reached it and talked to the people who lived there they received some shattering intelligence.

The girl had gone back to San Antonio!

“But why?” asked Walter, amazed. “Why should she go back there at such a time? Texas is expected to be in a blaze of war.”

“I know it,” said the woman to whom they spoke. “And she knew it. But she saw a newspaper, from Louisville, I think, and it had something in it about a relative dying and leaving her some money. She was afraid she couldn’t establish her identity without some papers which she’d left behind at San Antonio.”

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"Surely," said Ned Chandler, "she didn't go alone."

"No," said the woman. "My two sons went with her."

A little questioning showed that the girl's party had gone almost a week before; they had a wagon and a number of saddle horses; the woman had been told the way they'd take, but she had forgotten.

"Well," said Walter, a short time afterward when the two had talked the matter over from all sides, "the best thing I can think of is to go back up the river, if we can get a boat, and go down into Texas with Colonel Crockett."

"Good," said Ned Chandler, his blue eyes snapping with pleasure. "We're going to get down there after all. For a while I thought we'd be cheated out of it."

As Walter reasoned the matter out, while they'd probably reach San Antonio after the rival party of Sam Davidge, those gentlemen would be so far ahead that it

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would work against them rather than in their favor.

“They’ll get into the town before Miss Norton gets back there,” said the boy to Ned. “And they’ll be told that she left with Dolph months ago. Then they’ll head for New Orleans, and so miss her altogether. If Colonel Crockett’s ready to start soon, we’ll reach Texas not much, if any, behind a party that’s traveling overland with a wagon. They’ll have the trails to contend with all the way; also they’ll have to go slow and save their horses.”

They inquired about boats; and to their gratification there was one that very evening. They boarded her, counting themselves in great luck. She was the “Arkansas City,” a strong, bustling little craft, which steamed against the dark waters of the Mississippi with much valor.

Reaching Montgomery’s Point again, they went ashore. Once more luck was

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with them. Crockett was still at the Cumby plantation, but upon the eve of starting for Texas.

“I’m ‘tarnal glad to see you,” said the backwoodsman, heartily, as he clasped their hands, “and I’m also sorry about what’s happened. But if the girl’s gone to Texas—all right. We’ll find her there, if it can be done any way at all.”

While the two boys had been traveling up and down the Mississippi upon their hunt for Ethel Norton, Colonel Crockett had been working industriously. A great sum of money had been subscribed by numerous southern gentlemen to what was known as the “Crockett Fund.” This was to be devoted to the liberation of Texas.

The backwoods orator had made good his reputation ; his speeches for the Texan cause had drawn great throngs of people ; his words had a wide appeal, and people to whom the cry of the new country for aid had been faint and far away now heard it

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plainly for the first time. So, in consequence of all this, Crockett had grown much in reputation and influence.

Crockett had arranged to travel into Texas with a small party which was then ready for the journey. The recruiting was to go on, and the parties of volunteers were to be sent after them into the new country as they were armed and equipped.

As Walter and Ned saw a long journey ahead of them through a dangerous region, they set about preparing themselves for it. First they purchased, with the aid of Dolph, a couple of saddle horses of that small, tough breed common to the southwest.

“Those ponies,” said the old Texan, valuing the purchases with an expert eye, “will give you good service and are worth all you’ve paid for them. They are of the kind that without much corn will stand hard riding and still not be any the worse for it.”

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Next the lads bought themselves a rifle each. Both knew the use of the weapon, having hunted in the Kentucky mountains and woods many times. Also they purchased good, heavy, broad-bladed hunting knives and a couple of small hatchets, such as are used by woodsmen.

“And don’t forget a derringer each,” said Colonel Crockett. “It’s a small thing, has very little weight, and can be carried in the pocket without trouble. It’s a weapon that’s saved more lives at time of sudden danger than any other I know of.”

And so, with their derringers, hunting knives, hatchets and rifles, the two young fellows felt themselves very well armed indeed. Mounted upon their ponies, attired in fringed hunting shirts and broad brimmed hats, they looked very well fitted to cope with both the savage region and savage men ahead of them.

It was early one morning that the word was given; and off they started across

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Arkansas to Fulton, where they were to get the steamboat. The state of Arkansas was at that time very well settled ; its hospitable people never failed to do what they could for the travelers on their way to the war ; good food and good beds were to be had without trouble. At Fulton, which they made without any mishap, they boarded a boat which was to take them down the Red River as far as Natchitoches.

This latter proved to be a small place on the south bank of the river ; the party spent one night in the town, and then set off toward the Texan town of Nacogdoches, which lay a hundred and twenty miles away over the old Spanish trail.

This latter lay through a wild country in which ranged great herds of buffalo, and droves of small, active mustangs, wild for many generations.

“Tough little critters,” said old Dolph as he rode with the boys in advance of the party. “You never felt such hard mouths

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in your lives. Don't care no more for a bit than if it was of soft rubber."

"Oh, they are caught, then, and broken!" said Ned, looking at the hardy little fellows as they tore away over the prairies like the wind, their tails flying like banners.

"Lots of Mexicans and some Americans make a business of it," replied old Dolph. "Them two you boys are riding now once raced, wild, on these very plains."

It took three days between Natchitoches and Nacogdoches ; they camped by the side of the old trail at places where they could get water ; the air was bracing, the game they shot during the day was dressed, cooked and eaten, and the lads enjoyed every moment of the time.

About sundown upon the third day they sighted Nacogdoches and were warmly greeted by the people of the town. Nacogdoches lay a day's ride west of the Sabine River. At that time it had a population of about a thousand people ; but as it

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was a trading place and a stopping point for the flow of northern emigration into Texas, there was usually two or three times that number upon its streets. There was an old French fort, built more than a hundred years before to guard against the attacks of the Indians.

But there were now Indians a-plenty in the town. All the tribes for many miles into the wilderness came there to trade, and on the evening of the arrival of the party under Davy Crockett there were scores of them to be seen in the streets. Their nodding eagle feathers, their fringed buckskin leggings and beaded moccasins, their quivers of arrows and their long bows and sheathed knives gave them a wild and savage look. There were also many Mexicans in Nacogdoches, and their picturesque costumes, huge, jingling spurs, great sombreros, and viciously careening horses, contrasted strongly with the red or blue shirts of the American adventurers, their long boots, and

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modern equipment of arms and horse gear. Also there were a number of men in the backwoods garb of Crockett and the boys. These stood in quiet places, as a rule, leaning on their long rifles and looking bewildered at the bustle all around them, so different from the solitude of their native forests.

“Rather a lively sort of a town,” said Crockett, after they had put up their mounts at the tavern and were about to go in to supper. “Didn’t expect to see anything quite so stirring, Dolph.”

“You’ll not see another for some time again,” said the old Texan. “This country is not given to towns of any size, though I dare say we’ll grow some as we go along.”

They had a good supper, a good night’s rest and an excellent breakfast at Nacogdoches; and then they took horse and started upon the long journey toward the San Antonio River and the seat of war.

“Take it easy, youngsters,” said old

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Dolph. "Don't wear out yourselves or your ponies. You have a good bit of prairie to cross, and it's not to be done in a hurry if you hope to keep yourselves in condition."

At high noon the party stopped at a hurrying little stream that moved through a grove of tall trees. Here they rested and ate and drank. Away in the distance, across the level plains, could be seen a herd of grazing buffalo; and Crockett watched them, reclining upon his elbow.

"There hasn't been no such critters as them in Tennessee for many a year," said he. "And I'd like pretty well to have a shot or two at them before we leave this country behind."

Both Walter and Ned eagerly assented to this. The mighty bison appealed to them as a worthy subject for the chase.

"Let's have a try at them now," said Ned. But Crockett smiled in his droll fashion. "It's not so easy as you seem to think,

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youngster," said he. "It won't do to mount horse and ride out after game like that. They know what a horseman is, and they know what a rifle means when it speaks. And they are as shy as antelope, for all their size. You've got to get to windward of them or they'll scent you ; and once they do that they are off like sixty."

Crockett had no sooner uttered the last words than there came a queer shrilling sound such as neither of the boys had ever heard before, followed by a sudden shock of one body striking against another.

"Indians!" cried Davy Crockett as he threw himself flat upon the ground, his rifle in his hands, his keen eyes searching the green of the noonday prairie.

"Look!" said Ned Chandler, as he and Walter crouched low.

Walter looked in the direction indicated by his friend's pointing finger. There, quivering in the trunk of a tree, was a long Indian arrow.

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“So that’s what it was,” said young Jordan, drawing in his breath sharply. “Look, Ned, it’s sunk an inch into the wood. It’s good the red rascal made a bad shot of it.”

“Down all,” warned old Dolph. “There’s quite a party of them; and they have rifles as well as bows.”

“What do you think they are, Dolph?” asked Crockett, coolly, looking to his rifle.

“Comanches,” replied the Texan. “I can tell by their head-dress.”

There came a rattle of rifle shots and a cloud of arrows; and the boys saw a line of savage horsemen lift out of the long dry grass and come dashing toward the grove.

CHAPTER X

ATTACKED BY COMANCHES

THERE were four men in the party in the grove beside Crockett and Dolph. The two lads made up eight in all.

“Hold your fire,” cautioned Davy Crockett. “Don’t waste any of it, boys; because we’ve got our work cut out for us.”

There were at least twoscore of the savages dashing down upon the grove upon the backs of their hardy mustangs. Crockett had no idea of the marksmanship of his companions. Eight rifles in the hands of men who knew how to use them would work deadly havoc among the oncoming Indians; but if it should prove that the men were not skilled with the weapon, things would not be so well.

But the backwoodsman set his teeth.

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“It won’t be long before I know,” said he, grimly.

He threw forward his rifle.

“Ready!” said he.

The other weapons went forward; eight black muzzles peered out at the oncoming savages.

“Fire!” said Crockett.

The rifles spoke sharply; down in their tracks went several of the mustangs; and several others went dashing riderless across the prairie. Shrill yells went up from the Comanches; their ponies, startled at the sudden blaze of fire from ahead, and the fall of their fellows, reared, bucked, and tried to bolt off to one side. The Comanches fought with their mounts and at last headed them around, together, in the proper direction. But by this time the whites had reloaded.

“Fire!” ordered Colonel Crockett, once more.

Again the rifles cracked; and down went

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more horses and riders in a plunging heap, while the savage band, unable to face the deadly tubes which threw death into their faces, turned and bounded away over the grassy plain beyond range of the white men's fire.

Crockett rammed a fresh charge home.

"Good shooting," said he, approvingly. "One way or another, boys, we've accounted for a full dozen of the red rascallions."

The old Texan, together with the others, was also charging his piece.

"They're not done yet, colonel," said he. "The Comanche is a fighting Injun, and it takes a good bit to make him change his mind, once he's taken to the war-path."

"I didn't hear nothing 'bout them being at war with the whites," remarked one of the men.

"No more did I," said Dolph. "But, then, you can never tell. They are always rising. Let some rascal of a white man cheat a Comanche at a trading place and

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that Injun goes and tells his friends. Like as not, a small war follows, until they think they've got satisfaction."

"Well, that might be what this is," said Crockett, his eyes upon the party of savages which had come to a halt about a half mile out upon the prairie and were listening, apparently, to the eloquence of a chief. "But I've got an idea of my own."

"What's that?" asked the Texan.

"These redskins had some of their people in Nacogdoches last night and they were watching for some small party that was to leave the town. We happened to be that party. It's my idea they have taken a leaf from the white man's book, and are nothing more or less than robbers."

Old Dolph nodded.

"Well," said he, "I've heard of them doing things like that before now. But, whatever they're after, they mean to give it another try."

As he spoke the Texan pointed out across

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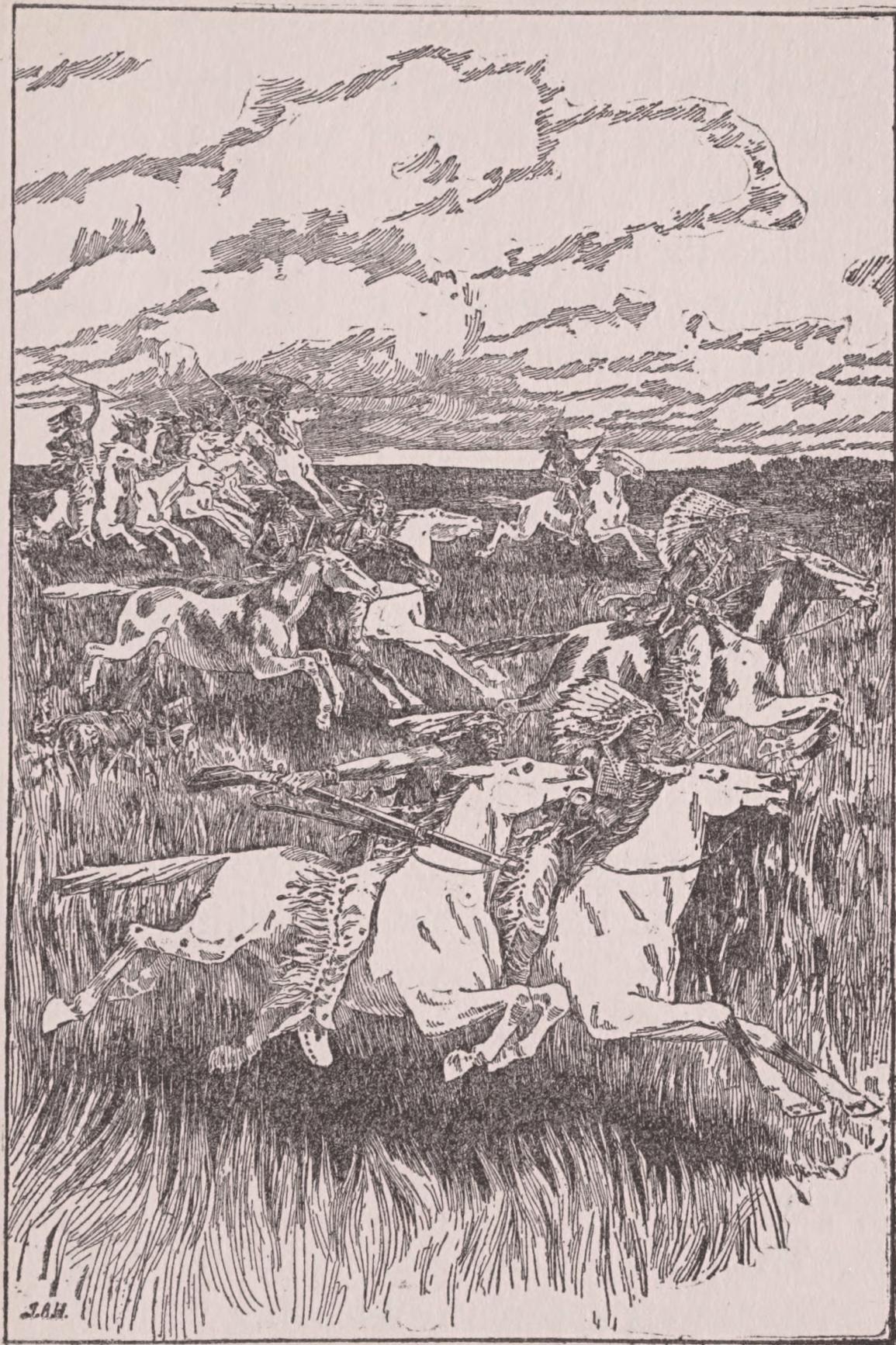
the prairie. The Comanches had remounted and were riding forward in an open fashion, their bows and rifles held ready for use. But at some distance from the grove they halted; dismounting, they made their ponies lie down. Then stretched at full length behind this living breastwork, they leveled their guns, and fitted arrows to their bows.

From behind trees and logs, the white men watched the preparations of the savages.

“That is a kind of a cute little dodge,” spoke Crockett. “I never see an Injun do it before.”

Old Dolph nodded and said:

“It’s a favorite trick with the Comanche and the Apache. These Injuns of the plain are ‘horse’ Injuns; and they’re different in their ways from the redskins you meet with in the wooded countries and the mountains. They spend most of their time catching and breaking ponies and learning tricks in riding. There are



THE COMANCHES HAD REMOUNTED

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some fine horsemen on these southwestern plains; but the finest of all are the Comanches."

Here the rifles of the Indians spoke. But, if they were excellent horsemen, as the Texan said, they were not good marksmen, for their bullets went wide. Their arrows, however, flew true, and many a feathered shaft struck with a deadly thud into the trunk of a tree behind which stood one of the whites.

A man near Crockett fired, rather excitedly, in return, and the bullet did no more than knock up the dust.

"Take care of your powder," said Crockett, from behind his tree, but never shifting his eyes from the dry grass where the savages lay behind their horses. "Don't waste a single charge. Take good aim; and don't fire until you see the whites of some one's eyes."

There was an interval of inaction; the savages were apparently reloading.

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“When they have loaded,” said old Dolph, “they’ll take a peep around their ponies to see what things look like over this way. So watch for them.”

“But don’t fire unless you are sure of your Injun,” said Crockett, who knew there was only a limited supply of powder in the party; and as there was no knowing how long the attack would continue, he wished to be as sparing as possible.

Sure enough, as the old Texan had said, when the Comanches had finished loading they showed a desire to know the exact position of their intended victims. A tufted head appeared around the side of a mustang. Dolph’s rifle cracked like a whip; there was a yell of pain and then silence.

“I got him,” said the old Texan, and he calmly reloaded his rifle.

Again came the flight of arrows and the reports of the Comanche rifles; but as before, the shafts and bullets did no harm. Crockett fired when he saw the plumes of a

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savage show above the back of a horse. It so chanced that the speeding bullet struck the mustang; it leaped up, forgetting its training; its rider was now exposed to the fire of the whites. Three rifles cracked; and the Comanche threw up his arms and sank back.

Seeing the deadly nature of the white men's marksmanship, the savages grew wary. Only now and then an arrow flew; occasionally a bullet lodged in the ground or in a tree trunk.

An hour passed in this way. It was now almost three o'clock; and Davy Crockett as he crouched behind his tree grew both weary and restless.

"They are cunning varmints," said he, "and they are holding off until nightfall. Under cover of darkness they'll creep up on us and beat us down by weight of numbers."

"Darkness will favor them," spoke old Dolph. "And if we are here when it falls, we are goners."

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“ Well,” said Crockett, in his dry way, “ I don’t see how we can get away with thirty pairs of eyes watching us.”

Here Walter Jordan spoke.

“ Colonel Crockett,” said he, “ I have an idea.”

“ Good ! ” said the backwoodsman.

“ We can’t see the Comanches as they lie behind their mustangs,” said the lad. “ But suppose I climbed one of these trees. I could have a good sight of them then, and could drive them off with a couple of shots, maybe.”

Crockett smiled and twisted his good-humored mouth drolly to one side.

“ That’s a very good plan, youngster,” said he. “ But it has one big drawback. How are you going to get up the tree? The redskins would tumble you over before you’d get half-way.”

He saw the disappointed look upon the boy’s face, and added :

“ If we were hard pressed and had to do

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something on the jump, it would be a thing we could try. But, as it stands, I think I'll make a little experiment that'll be safe."

Then turning his head he glanced toward the tree which concealed the old Texan.

"Dolph, who do you reckon's the best shot in the lot of us?"

"You are," replied the veteran, promptly.

"Who's next?" asked Crockett.

"I'd like to say I am," spoke Dolph, humorously. "But I can't, and stick close to the truth. Jed Curley's the best shot here after yourself, colonel."

Jed Curley was a young adventurer of about twenty-five with whom both Walter and Ned had become very friendly. He was a powerfully built fellow, and his clear eyes and steady nerves gave him the working basis of a sharp-shooter.

"All right," said Crockett. "Just where are you located, Jed?"

"Right here, colonel," came the voice of the young man.

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“All right. Lie low, but listen to what I’m going to say to you.”

“I’m listening.”

“I’m going to fire at that pinto Injun pony,” said Crockett. “Not to kill it, though; I’ll be careful of that. You see, that pony jumping up a while ago gave me a notion.”

“I see it, colonel,” came the voice of Jed. “You scare up the mustang, that leaves the Injun uncovered, and before he can get shelter, I draw a bead on him.”

“Exactly,” answered Crockett. “Ready, Jed?”

“All ready.”

There was a moment’s silence; then Crockett’s rifle rang out. One of the ponies leaped up with a snort; Jed Curley’s piece cracked instantly and the red rascal behind it lay silent in the grass.

Quickly the two men reloaded; again Crockett fired; once more a wounded mustang uncovered its master; a second

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time the sharp-shooter's rifle spoke, and the master lay as silent as the other.

Within twenty minutes this performance had been gone through three times; then a panic seemed to strike the savages; they leaped up, urged their horses to their feet, mounted and turned to flee.

"A volley, boys!" yelled Crockett.
"Take good aim."

The volley pealed from the six rifles that were still loaded, and four more of the Comanches fell. Then the remainder of the band, with startled yells, went flying toward the east.

CHAPTER XI

THE BUFFALO HUNT

RAPIDLY reloading, the little party of whites stood upon the verge of the grove and watched the band of redskins race away across the plains.

“From the looks of things,” said old Dolph, “I’d say they’ll not be back this way.”

Crockett shook his head and laughed.

“No,” said he, “those Comanche gentlemen are completely scared. That was a trick they’d not thought about; and as they hadn’t time to work it out, they thought, very like, it was some kind of ‘bad medicine.’ ”

However, they made up their minds not to trust to appearances; and mounting their horses they rode away toward

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the southwest, going at a long, slow lope.

Night fell, and still they continued.

“It’s best to put all the distance between ourselves and that party of reds that we can,” said Crockett. “They’re the kind of varmints you can never count on to do anything.”

When they went into camp an hour or so after dark, they lighted no fires, but ate food that required no cooking.

“It makes hard chewing,” grumbled old Dolph. “But then it can’t be helped. Better a tough bite of grub than an Injun arrow that’d make me bite the dust.”

The night was cool, but they made beds of grass, wrapped themselves in their blankets, and with their saddles for pillows, they slept soundly. For the first time since they started from the Mississippi River, however, they had a guard for the camp, Jed Curley, Ned Chandler and old Dolph taking turns until sunrise and breakfast.

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They pushed on rapidly that day, keeping a sharp lookout for the savages. But none came in sight; and so, to rest their ponies, which had been severely tried, they halted a good two hours before sundown and went into camp upon the banks of a small creek whose margin was thick with trees.

Walter Jordan and Ned Chandler had, during the day, tried their marksmanship upon some flocks of prairie chickens; and though these were difficult game to bring down with a rifle, they had bagged a couple of brace. The chickens were now stripped of their feathers and dressed; each was skewered with a ramrod, and put to roast over the red coals. Flour was mixed and baked into flap-jacks; and so they ate a meal such as was enjoyed by the riders of the plains.

A guard was kept that night, also; but there were no signs of Comanches, and they slept undisturbed. After breakfast next

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morning they mounted once more and started upon their journey.

It was a splendid country which they now crossed, not so level as that of the previous day's journey, but rich in promise of the yield to the farmer in the days to come.

"A wonderful range for grazing live stock," said Crockett, his observant eye taking in all the details and possibilities of the region. "There'll be grass in long seasons, and there's plenty of water."

Old Dolph agreed with this.

"It's the best grazing country in the southwest," said he. "To prove that just notice the herds of buffalo and wild mustangs that roam through this country. They know the places where the good grass grows."

There was a silence for some little time, and then Ned Chandler said :

"I've heard a good deal about buffalo hunting, and I'd like to have a try at it before we reach San Antonio."

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“So should I,” spoke Jed Curley. “It seems as though it would be fine sport.”

“Well,” said Davy Crockett, “as I’ve said, I shouldn’t despise the chance myself, boys. It’s been many a year since I’ve had a run after a herd of buffalo, and if we sight any, we’ll take half a day off our journey and have a shot at them.”

This filled both Ned and Walter with enthusiasm ; and all day they looked forward eagerly to the possibility of sport. But they were disappointed ; the sun was getting low, and they were casting about for a camping ground when suddenly old Dolph was heard to call out to Crockett :

“Hello ! Look there !”

All turned and they saw him pointing to the ground some little distance away. It was near the brink of a spring that oozed from the ground in a sort of hollow ; and all about it were the marks of trampling hoofs.

“Buffalo !” said Colonel Crockett.

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The entire party gathered about the spring and examined the tracks.

"There were only about half a dozen," said the old Texan, as his sharp eyes followed out the hoof prints. "But there's a herd near by. These were only stragglers, come to look for water."

Supper was cooked and eaten that evening amid considerable excitement; and as they lay wrapped in their blankets afterward, the boys listened to the stories told by Crockett and old Dolph of mighty buffalo hunters who had gone before and of hunts that had come to be parts of the history of the west. Story after story followed, the other men taking part, telling of their own experiences in chase of the mighty beast of the plains, or those of others whom they had known. Both youngsters dropped off to sleep with the voices still coming out of the shadows around the camp-fire; and little wonder that they dreamed of great herds of buffalo whose hoof beats were like the

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thunder, and whose mighty rush seemed to shake the earth.

At sunup all were astir, and breakfast was quickly over ; then they looked at their arms and ammunition, and climbed upon their horses' backs.

“ Now, boys,” said Crockett, to the two young fellows who rode beside him, “ as you never rode the buffalo range before, it’s just as well that you know something about the matter. Above all, look out for the buffalo bull ; you’ve heard of the grizzly bear and the panther and other dangerous beasts, and they are dangerous enough, to be sure. But the buffalo bull, especially when he’s wounded, is one of the worst brutes that a man ever faced.”

“ So, when you draw a bead on one,” said old Dolph, who rode near by, “ be sure and aim at a place that’ll make the shot fatal. If you don’t, you’ll have a job on your hands that’ll be hard to finish.”

The tracks of the buffalo they’d been fol-

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lowing finally merged into a wide, much trampled trail, evidently made by hundreds of the animals.

“Just as I thought,” said the old Texan, in a satisfied tone. “They belonged to a big herd, and now have joined the rest of them.”

Along the broad, trampled track of the buffalo rode the hunters, their eyes ahead to catch the first glimpse of the game.

“Some ponies don’t like the smell of buffalo,” said Dolph; “and they are hard to get up to a herd. Others again don’t care anything about them and are likely to run you into danger if you don’t look out. The best kind of a horse is the kind that understands what you are about—that the thing’s a hunt—that there’s a time for getting in close, and a time for getting away.”

“I suppose,” said Walter, “they must be trained to that.”

“Mostly, yes,” said Dolph. “But not always. Some mustangs take to the thing

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naturally. This one that I'm riding is one of that kind. He knows all about buffalo. But it may be that none of the others know anything. So give one eye to the game and the other to your pony."

It was about noon that they sighted the herd ; far off on the plains the great shaggy beasts were grazing on the dry grass, scattered over a great extent of country. The hunters halted at the first glimpse of them, and held a consultation.

"The wind is dead from the west," said Crockett.

"It'd be well if some of us stayed here," said old Dolph, "and if some others rode around to the east, and others to the north. Then at a signal—say a rifle shot—we could all ride down on them from three directions and scatter them all over the prairie."

This was considered a good idea. So Dolph and two of the men were left at the halting place and the other five pushed around to the east. Here Jed Curley and

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one other man were left ; Crockett and the two boys held on until they reached a point south of the grazing buffalo.

The great animals were slowly moving about upon the range, never suspecting that their hunters were so close at hand.

“ All ready ? ” asked Colonel Crockett.

“ All ready,” answered the boys in a breath.

They rode forward at a sharp gallop. Crockett’s rifle rang out in signal to the others waiting to the north and east ; and the shot also served to bring down a cow which stood near. Startled at the shot, the great heads lifted and the bulls stared about for a sight of the enemy. Then the rifles of the boys spoke and another of the beasts fell.

The air was filled with bellowings ; away toward the north moved the herd. But in a few moments the reports of rifles from that point turned them toward the south and east. Jed Curley and his companion

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were now heard from ; and as their rifles were discharged, the buffalo halted in a panic. For a moment there was a pause ; then helter skelter they went in every direction over the plains, their tails up and their heads down.

The hunters had all reloaded their pieces and they now dashed in among the scattered herd, each selecting his particular quarry. The pony which Walter Jordan rode was a hard-mouthed little beast, with a temper all its own. He fancied he'd have some trouble with it if it proved to be one of those mounts which Dolph said didn't like the smell of buffalo.

But it was the contrary. The mustang seemed to enter into the spirit of the chase with such excellent good will that the boy was delighted. He passed several cows and yearling bulls ; but held his fire for bigger game. His eyes traveling over the racing buffalo had lighted upon a huge bull, a monstrous black fellow with a huge head

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and the shoulders and hump of a giant of his kind.

Fired with ambition and encouraged by the willingness of his horse, Walter dashed toward the black bull. When within fifteen yards he dropped the reins, steadied his pony with his knees and raised his long rifle. Clear and sharp the report rang out; the great bull stopped in his tracks, threw up his huge black head and bellowed with rage.

“Watch that fellow!” yelled Jed Curley as he dashed away in pursuit of another bull. “He’s only wounded!”

Walter remembered what old Dolph had said regarding wounded bulls, and wheeled his horse away. Rapidly he began recharging his rifle; his eyes went from this operation to the wounded bull; for the moment he forgot his horse entirely. Suddenly the mustang went to his knees; he had planted a forefoot in a prairie-dog’s hole, and Walter, unable to stop himself, went flying

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over his head, his rifle dropping from his hands.

Like a cat, the mustang scrambled to its feet and darted away; and the boy stood dismounted and weaponless, facing the great black bull.

CHAPTER XII

A FIGHT WITH MEXICANS

THE bull which faced Walter Jordan was apparently the monarch of the herd. He had wicked little eyes which were now red with rage and the pain of his wound. His hoofs tore at the sod, his jaws champed, and a rumbling bellow sounded deep in his throat. Before him was his foe. Somehow this creature which stood before him had wounded him. And now he was going to be revenged!

Lowering his giant head the bull charged at Walter; the boy stood his ground until the animal was almost upon him; then he sprang aside, and the great bulk of the mad-dened brute tore by him like a tornado.

Then Walter leaped to the place where his rifle had fallen. The charge of powder and ball had been rammed home; the piece

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only required priming, and the boy was hurriedly attending to this very necessary thing when the black bull wheeled, sighted him, and charged once more. But this time the beast was more cunning. Apparently he had profited by the one fruitless charge ; he seemed to have weighed the situation and planned to overcome it.

The charge was slow ; the head was not held so low ; the little angry eyes were fixed upon the boy. This time Walter knew he could not wait until the last moment and then leap aside out of danger. The bull meant to trample him under his sharp hoofs and gore him to death. But for all he realized this, his hands were steady as they worked at the priming of his rifle. The seconds passed and he realized, with a cold feeling at his heart, that the piece would not be ready to fire before the monster was upon him. His breath stopped, as though to meet the shock. Then he heard a voice cry out :

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“Steady, boy!”

Like the crack of a whip a rifle rang out; the black bull halted; the great head drooped; then a shudder ran through its mighty frame, and it toppled over on its side—dead.

“I call that a close shave,” came the voice of Crockett. “Another moment, youngster, and you’d have been under his feet.”

Dazed, and with a sense of everything being a very long distance away, Walter turned and saw Colonel Crockett and old Dolph ride up. Crockett slipped from his horse and began to reload his gun, while the old Texan sat admiring the huge beast which had fallen before the backwoodsman’s aim.

“Well, Colonel Crockett,” said the young fellow, as his wits slowly came back to him, and he realized what had happened, “I have you to thank for that.”

Crockett drove home the charge of powder, and smiled in his usual droll way.

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"I have *you* to thank," said he, "for giving me a shot at the finest bull I ever saw. What do you think, Dolph?"

The wrinkled veteran shook his head.

"He's a mighty beast," said he. "There are not many like him on these prairies, if any."

In a half hour the herd of buffalo had so scattered over the plain that the hunters had brought down a dozen or so in all; and as the ponies were tired by the sharp work, and they had no desire uselessly to slaughter the bison, they halted in the pursuit and returned to the place where their leader had been left.

"Well," said Crockett, "we've had a very good little hunt of it while it lasted. And now if we're going to have any of the meat, we'd better set about it and then be on our way."

They cut sufficient tender meat from the carcass of a yearling which old Dolph had been careful to shoot for just that purpose,

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and with this carefully packed, they resumed their journey toward the southwest.

The day's ride was filled with "buffalo" talk; and the camp-fire that night saw a roasting of juicy strips of the yearling's meat and a fervent wishing that the party might fall in with such royal sport at least once more before they had reached their journey's end.

Next day they crossed the Brazos; and a few days further the Colorado came in sight. As they caught the sheen of its waters under the afternoon sun, they also caught the glint of something harder.

"Cold steel," said Crockett, shading his eyes with both hands, and looking keenly ahead.

A party of almost a score of horsemen were advancing, the sun striking their rifle barrels. But it was the glitter of the points of long lances they carried that had attracted the attention of the band under Crockett.

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“Mexicans,” said old Dolph as he took a long look at the party. “No one else carries a spear, except the Comanche; and these ain’t redskins.”

“Well,” said Colonel Crockett, and he turned his eyes from the oncoming horsemen to the country round about, “I reckon the Mexicans, as a class, ain’t any too well disposed toward Americans. So we might just as well pick out a place to meet them.”

Some little distance to the left was a sort of knoll, heavily wooded and overlooking the river; this seemed a likely sort of place for a stand against an enemy, so Crockett gave the order, the mustangs were headed toward the knoll, and the Americans took their station upon it.

As they were ascending its side, the Mexicans saw them for the first time, and halted. Then a half dozen of them rode forward to have a closer look at the northerners; having gained a knowledge of their

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scanty numbers, the Mexicans uttered loud cries of triumph, shook their weapons at the party upon the knoll, and then rode back to their friends.

Crockett ordered his men dismounted ; the mustangs were placed among the trees and fastened by the bridles. Then with ready rifles the little band faced the opposing riders of the plains.

With a sudden fan-like movement the Mexicans spread out in a sort of half circle and dashed at the rising ground upon which the Americans had taken their station.

“Ready ?” said Crockett.

“All ready,” was the answer.

“Fire !” came the order.

The deadly rifles spoke ; a half dozen of the Mexicans went down in the dust.

Swiftly the long weapons were reloaded. Once more they were leveled and again they flashed out their messages of death. This time the Mexicans halted in their rush ; half their company lay upon the ground.

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With one accord they tugged at their bridles, whirled their active little horses around, and bolted off across the plains.

“Hello,” cried Walter Jordan, as he rose up and gazed after the flying horsemen. “Look there!”

“It’s a boy,” shouted Ned Chandler, “and he’s tied to one of the ponies.”

“An American, too,” said old Dolph, as he drove home the ball into the barrel of his rifle.

In the rear of the Mexicans raced a pony which bore upon its back, evidently tightly bound to the saddle, an American boy of about sixteen years.

“A prisoner,” said Jed Curley, throwing forward his deadly rifle.

“Take care, Jed,” warned Crockett. “Don’t kill or cripple the mustang so that it’ll fall! The boy might be hurt; for tied up as he is, he can’t help himself.”

Jed’s rifle sounded; but apparently he missed, for the pony continued.

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"I was *too* careful," said Jed. "You try, colonel."

Crockett threw his long rifle to his shoulder; its report was answered by a leap from the running horse; the animal went painfully on for some little distance upon three legs; then it slowed down and finally stopped altogether.

At this the Americans mounted in haste and rode across the prairie to the place where the wounded pony stood, with the boy, trussed and helpless, upon his back.

Jed Curley cut the bonds with his hunting knife. The young fellow slipped from the back of the horse and sat upon the ground rubbing the circulation back into his arms and legs.

"They had these ropes so tight," said he, "that I could hardly breathe."

He was about sixteen years of age, a bright-looking lad with, apparently, plenty of spirit and good sense.

"What's your name, sonny?" inquired

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old Dolph, as he sat his horse looking down at him.

“ Sid Hutchinson,” answered the boy. “ And I thank you, gentlemen, for saving me from the Mexicans.”

The party dismounted and Walter and Ned helped young Hutchinson rub back his circulation.

“ How did they come to get you ? ” asked Davy Crockett. “ Where are you from ? ”

“ From New Orleans,” answered the boy. “ I was crossing Texas to San Antonio with a wagon, my brother, and a girl.”

Both Walter and Ned paused in their operations ; they gazed at the boy and then at each other.

“ A girl ? ” demanded Walter.

“ What was her name ? ” asked Ned.

“ Ethel Norton,” replied Sam Hutchinson. “ And I haven’t even the smallest idea where she or my brother is now.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLOTTERS ONCE MORE

FOR a moment after the statement by Sid Hutchinson, the two boys and Crockett looked at each other in wonder.

“Well,” said the colonel, finally, “it’s like finding a needle in a haystack, boys ; but we’ve found it—all by chance.”

In a few words Walter had told young Hutchinson the necessary facts of his hunt for Ethel Norton ; and Sid looked amazed.

“Well, look at that!” said he. “Did you ever hear anything like it before!”

“But tell us what’s happened,” urged Ned Chandler. “How did the Mexicans come to get you ?”

The boy got upon his feet.

“We had about as nice and quiet a journey as you’ve ever seen,” said he. “Nothing happened until yesterday, when

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we crossed the Colorado and went into camp. Then we met three Americans."

"Three!" said Walter.

"Yes," replied the other boy. "They were, strangely enough, coming from San Antonio, and were on their way to New Orleans."

Again Ned and Crockett and Walter exchanged glances. The eyes of the backwoodsman were full of laughter.

"Well, well!" said he. "And of course you all got to talking and saying how queer it was that you were going *from* New Orleans *to* San Antonio."

"Yes, of course," admitted the boy.

"Did the three Americans seem interested?" asked the backwoodsman.

"They did," said Sid Hutchinson. "That is, for a while. Then they seemed to shut up tight; and they didn't say much more about anything."

"Did they give any names?" asked Walter.

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“One’s name was Huntley—I think they called him colonel. Then there was a sharp looking man in black—Davidge they called him. I forget the name of the third one.”

“Well,” asked Davy Crockett, “what happened?”

“We thought they meant to camp with us that night,” said Sid. “But they changed their minds and went away a little after dark.”

“When were you attacked by the Mexicans?” asked Crockett.

“This morning. We’d just broken camp and had got the mules hitched to the wagon, when they came down on us.”

“What became of Miss Norton?” asked Ned, feverishly.

“The last I saw of her,” said Sid, “she was on a mustang, tearing away toward the southwest with my brother Bill beside her. Then I was cut off, and headed for the river, meaning to swim my pony across.

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I'd got to this side, but the Mexicans knew the country and in a little while had me surrounded. Then they took me back across the river and began following the trail of those of their band who'd rode after Ethel Norton and my brother Bill."

"Yes, yes," said Walter and Ned in a breath.

"We'd gone about six or eight miles," said the boy, "and then we heard firing ahead ; some of the Mexicans went forward to find out what it meant ; they came back in a little while full tilt and away we struck back for the river once more. We'd crossed and had ridden about an hour on this side when we sighted you folks."

"Haven't you any idea what the firing meant that you heard when the party stopped and turned back ? "

Sid shook his head.

"I'm not sure," said he. "But if my judgment's any good, I'd say that the lot that had gone in chase of Ethel and my

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brother had been given a good stiff run, and in the end had fallen in with some Americans who'd sailed into them."

"In that case," said Walter, "Miss Norton would be all right."

Sid nodded.

"That's what I think," said he.

"There's only one way to make sure," said Davy Crockett. "And that's to cross the river and find out."

The pony which Sid Hutchinson had been bound upon was not fit to ride; but there were a number of riderless mustangs standing and trotting about on the plain, belonging to Mexicans who had fallen in the fight. One of these was caught without trouble, and Sid mounted at once.

In the course of an hour they reached a ford of the Colorado and crossed; Sid led them to the site of the encampment where the Mexicans had first attacked them; and at once Crockett and Dolph caught the trail of the pursuers of Ethel Norton and Sid's

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brother Bill, and away they rode, the remainder of the party following with ready rifles. After a hard ride they came to a place which was thickly grown with timber.

Sid Hutchinson called to Crockett.

“Here’s where we stopped when we heard the firing,” said he. “It was somewhere on the other side of the timber.”

The party pushed their way through the trees ; and in a little while they came upon the scene of what must have been a hard fight.

“And once more the Mexicans got the worst of it,” said Jed Curley.

Dead men and horses lay about ; but of living men there was no trace. Dolph rode about the field and narrowly scanned the field for indications.

“Here’s the way the Mexicans went when they left,” said he, pointing to the ground. “And here’s the direction the people took who fought them.”

Both Walter and Ned examined the last

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trail eagerly ; both had the same thought in his mind.

“ Wagon tracks,” said Walter. “ Here they are.”

“ Hurrah ! ” shouted Ned excitedly.

“ Ethel and Bill’s gone off with the party that rescued them,” spoke young Hutchinson.

“ And toward San Antonio,” said Davy Crockett.

The little band followed the trail for a few miles and then went into camp. Early in the morning they were off once more. But the party ahead of them were evidently hard riders, for the distance between them did not seem to decrease.

“ It’s my private opinion,” said Colonel Crockett, “ that this trail is a half dozen hours old. More than likely the folks ahead have ridden a good part of the night.”

In the afternoon they crossed the Guadalupe River and pushed toward San Antonio de Bexer. They did not reach the town un-

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til long after nightfall ; and then Crockett rode directly to the headquarters of Colonel Travis, where he was warmly welcomed.

Travis was a stalwart young man who had gone into Texas much as Crockett himself had done ; and he shook hands with the two boys cordially.

“ I’m glad to see you,” said he. “ Every state in the Union seems to be sending men and boys to help the cause along. In a little while we shall have an army large enough for work against Santa Anna. And then we can begin active operations.”

The boys were then introduced to “ Jim ” Bowie, known throughout the southwest as the first user of the celebrated “ Bowie knife.” He was a big light-haired man, with the blue eyes of the fighter, and had crossed the prairies from Louisiana, where he had his home, to take part in the coming struggle.

“ There’s hardly a day,” said he, after he had greeted the party with rare good will,

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"that I don't meet a few newcomers. To-day it's Colonel Crockett and his friends ; yesterday it was an American girl and boy who were racing across the plains near the Colorado with a crew of Mexicans after them full tilt."

Both Ned and Walter grasped Colonel Bowie's arm.

"A girl!" said Ned.

"Where is she now?" demanded Walter.

Bowie looked from one to the other of the boys in surprise.

"She's just now with Mrs. Allison, and, I reckon, sound asleep," said he. "But there's the boy in the next room there."

Sid Hutchinson leaped through the door and into the adjoining room with a whoop. A young fellow of about nineteen sat reading an old newspaper in a corner ; and in a moment he and Sid had their arms about each other and were prancing about the room like mad. When the first great rush of joy was over, Sid introduced his brother

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to Walter and Ned who had followed him into the room, and in a few words explained the facts of his capture and rescue and of Walter and Ned's search for Ethel Norton.

Bill Hutchinson listened in surprise.

"Well," said he, at length, "it does beat all how things come about, doesn't it? Ethel will be glad to see you." Then turning to his brother he added, "Do you remember those three men who rode up to our camp the other night and then rode away?"

"I do," said Sid.

"Well, what would you say if I told you I saw them among the Mexicans who chased me and Ethel?"

"I'd believe it," said Sid, quietly and promptly. And then he told his brother who the three were, and the nature of their errand to Texas. Bill listened, amazed.

"Hello!" said he. "Hello! What's this!"

"They are rogues," said Walter. "And as Sam Davidge is to come into the estate

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in case Ethel Norton does not claim it, there's no telling what they would do, should she fall into their hands."

"That's good sense," remarked Bill Hutchinson. "And I say the same. Well, I guess Ethel's all right now, though. She's with Mrs. Allison, and *she* is an American woman of the right kind."

"Where does Mrs. Allison live?" asked Ned Chandler.

"At the end of town which you must have entered," replied Bill. "It's a small 'dobe house with a garden about it. It stands all alone."

Both Walter and Ned remembered the house, for they had passed by its very door. There had been a light burning in one of the windows and they had remarked how lonely it looked, as they rode toward it over the trail. And now, when they learned that the girl they had come so far to see was there, and recalled the loneliness of the place, they looked at each other.

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"Suppose," suggested Walter, "we go over that far and take a look at things."

Ned was willing and eager, and the two Hutchinsons showed an interested willingness.

As the boys passed through the room where Crockett sat with Travis and Bowie and some others, they, in a low voice, told him where they were going.

"It's rather late," said the backwoodsman. "And like as not they'll all be abed. But," with a nod of the head, "it never does any harm to have a look around."

San Antonio was one of the oldest Spanish settlements in Texas. The site was first occupied in 1715 as a military post to protect the region from the French, then occupying Louisiana, and also to guard the Franciscan friars whose missions, planted along the San Antonio River, were liable to attack from the Indians.

It was an important town, having a population of about twenty-five hundred, and

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was a celebrated trading place for the Indians and the Mexicans of the northern provinces.

Under the Franciscans, a great number of Indians had been taught the laws of civilization and religion ; great irrigation ditches had been cut to water the soil ; fine stone buildings and churches had been erected. But during the period of American filibustering expeditions, and the revolution during which the Mexicans threw off the rule of Spain, the town had been left practically unprotected ; the attacks of the fierce people of the plains, the Comanches and Apaches, had been frequent ; and so the churches and stone buildings were now ruins, the great ditches choked and useless, the civilized Indians had disappeared.

So it was a very much decayed San Antonio through which the four boys passed on their way to Mrs. Allison's house.

The moon was shining, and the little

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'dobe building stood silent and pale under its cold light. As the boys stood some little distance away, they heard the whinny of a horse and the stamp of hoofs. But they did not attribute any importance to this; horses were to be heard and seen anywhere in towns like San Antonio. But when they saw two indistinct forms holding close to the shadows thrown by the house, they became all attention.

"Take it quietly now," warned Walter Jordan. "It might mean nothing at all."

Upon their hands and knees they approached the house; or at least three of them did, for Sid Hutchinson had noiselessly left them, walked softly along the deserted street for a space, and was now speeding as hard as he could go for the American headquarters.

Walter and Ned had left their rifles behind them, but each possessed a derringer which Crockett had advised them to buy at the beginning of the journey west from the

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Mississippi. But Bill Hutchinson had no weapon except a hatchet which he carried in his belt.

There now came a rattling sound and a jingling as though something had dropped to the ground.

“They are forcing the door,” whispered Ned Chandler.

The boys pressed forward, cautiously, but with more speed. The door of the house was open; as they stood beside it, not sure of their next movement, and not wanting to make a false one, there came a sudden and startling scream from the interior. At this they sprang inside, the derringers and the tomahawk held ready for use.

Upon their appearance there came a shot and a confusion of voices which Walter and Ned recognized as those of Huntley and Barker. Then there was a smashing of glass.

“This way!” cried the voice of Colonel Huntley.

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“He’s going through the window at the other side of the house,” cried Ned.

The three lads darted out, and around the house. Under some trees not far from the trail were a dozen or more mounted men. Huntley was running toward these, the fainting form of a girl in his arms.

Like young panthers both Walter and Ned sprang upon him; he dropped the girl under the weight of their attack, and with the fury of a giant fought them off. Barker scrambled upon his horse, and his voice was now heard shouting to the Mexicans.

“Shoot, you yellow idiots! Why don’t you shoot!”

“Five hundred dollars to the man who gets the girl!” came the voice of Sam Davidge.

Rifles and small arms were flung forward in the moonlight; Huntley drew a derringer and advanced upon the boys. But before a shot could be fired there came a rush of hoofs; old Dolph, Jed Curley and a

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dozen more, with Sid Hutchinson in their midst, dashed upon the scene.

Huntley, seeing them, leaped upon his horse and, after firing a wild shot at the boys from the pistol, wheeled his mount and tore away down the trail with the Mexicans.

Like the wind, Dolph, Jed and Sid Hutchinson and their party tore by in pursuit. From the distance came the sound of hoofs and the rattle of shots; then the boys lifted up the fainting Ethel Norton and carried her back to the house.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF THE ALAMO

THE scream and the pistol shot had awakened Mrs. Allison ; and when the boys appeared in the doorway with the fainting girl, she was awaiting them.

“Put her down there,” she directed calmly, pointing to a couch covered with a huge buffalo robe.

Under the attentions of Mrs. Allison, who was one of the women of the border, and had been for years accustomed to sudden dangers and calls for help, Ethel Norton quickly revived. In a very little while she had recovered from her fright and was able to talk ; and then Bill Hutchinson introduced Walter and Ned, and they told their story once more.

“Oh !” cried the girl, when she had

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heard it all and realized the nature of the danger she had just escaped, "how can people be so cruel and so wicked! And," looking from one to the other of them, "how can I thank you all for what you have done for me?"

They were still talking the situation over eagerly when the sound of horses' hoofs came from the trail. It was the party under old Dolph and Jed.

"They never stopped," cried Sid Hutchinson as he slid from the horse of Jed, for he had been mounted behind that adventurer. "They fired back at us, but kept right on running."

"He means," said Jed, with a laugh, "all of them that were able to."

"What of Huntley and Davidge and Barker?" asked Ned, anxiously.

Old Dolph shook his head.

"They are among the ones not able to," said he. "You youngsters need never be uneasy about them varmints any more."

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For about a week after this Ethel Norton was quite ill, and still another week passed before she felt able to travel ; and the boys remained in San Antonio watching the preparations going on for receiving Santa Anna and his army ; and also preparing for their own long journey across the plains toward the Red River.

Davy Crockett gave them much good advice upon this point.

“ Wait a few days,” said he ; “ I think a party will be going your way and you can join them. And if there is not, we’ll have old Dolph guide you back. We can spare one man, I suppose.”

The boys waited well into the third week ; but there was no sign of a party traveling in this direction. So Crockett consulted with Travis, Bowie and old Dolph, and it was decided that they delay no longer.

“ You were sent to get the girl to Louisville,” said Crockett to the boys, “ and I guess you’d better do it right away. In a

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country as unsettled as this one is, too much delay is dangerous."

"But you are going to stay, colonel?" said Walter.

"As long as Texas has a foe out in the open, I'll stay," replied the backwoodsman. "Some day I may go back to Tennessee; but that all depends on how things go with me. War, you know," and he smiled in his droll way, "is a mighty uncertain thing."

During the remainder of that day the boys, together with the Hutchinson brothers and old Dolph, looked to their arms and horses. A mustang was presented to Ethel by Colonel Crockett; and at noon on the day following the girl, the veteran Texan and the four boys mounted and waved a good-bye to the heroes they were leaving behind—and heroes they were—heroes such as the world has seldom seen.

Upon the day on which the young travelers recrossed the Colorado, sentinels upon a roof top at San Antonio noted the ad-

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vance of a Mexican force. It proved to be Santa Anna with an army of seven thousand men. The Texans quickly retreated across the river to the Franciscan mission buildings, known as the Alamo. For there were only one hundred and fifty men in the garrison, and they could not hope to face seven thousand in the open.

The Alamo buildings consisted of a church, with a convent and hospital behind it. Then there was a yard enclosed by a stone wall. The entire place was too much for so small a force to defend; so Travis very wisely stationed his men in the church, which was a stone structure with powerful walls and facing the river and town.

“We have fourteen guns mounted on the walls,” said the young North Carolinian as he swept the plaza before the mission with his keen eyes. “And I reckon the Mexicans will know they’ve been in a fight if they ever get within reach of them.”

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Behind these cannon the Texan riflemen awaited the movements of the force of Santa Anna. That commander at once grouped his guns in battery formation and opened fire; the defenders of the Alamo replied with their guns; but their deadly rifles were the most effective weapon; with them they picked off the gunners as berries are picked from a bush.

Travis, while the way was yet open, sent out a message to the Texas government asking that aid be sent them. All the time the force of the Mexicans was growing larger. Colonel Fannin set out from Goliad with three hundred men and four pieces of artillery, to the aid of the Texans at the Alamo. But he had little provision, his ammunition wagon broke down, and he hadn't enough oxen to get his cannon across the river. Fannin at length gave up the attempt and returned to Goliad. However, a bold leader, at the head of thirty-two daring followers, arrived on the night

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of March first and slipped through the Mexican lines. This was Captain Smith and his little command from Gonzales ; and the defenders welcomed them with cheers.

On March fourth Travis sent off a last message to the Texan authorities ; this was carried by the brave Captain Smith, who set his comrades' lives above his own safety. The message said in part :

“. . . although we may be sacrificed to the vengeance of a Gothic enemy, the victory will cost that enemy so dear that it will be worse than a defeat. . . . A blood red flag waves from the church of Bexer and in the camp above us, in token that the war is one of vengeance against rebels. These threats have had no influence upon my men but to make all fight with desperation and with that high souled courage which characterizes the patriot who is willing to die for his country ; liberty and his own honor ; God and Texas ; victory or death ! ”

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On the day following the sending of this message, Santa Anna assembled his troops for an assault upon the Alamo; but it was not until the succeeding day that the attack was delivered. Twenty-five hundred troops were divided into four columns commanded by Colonels Duque, Romero and Morales; they had bars, axes and scaling ladders. All the Mexican cavalry were drawn up around the mission to see that no one escaped.

Early in the morning the four columns, at the sound of the bugle, dashed forward; the Texan cannon and the long rifles spat death in their faces. The column under Duque recoiled from the north wall, their commander badly wounded. East and west the attack also failed; the Mexicans swarmed in a shouting mob upon the north side. Their officers shouted and struck at them, forcing them to scale the walls. Once more the sleet of bullets from the American rifles came forth, and once more

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the attackers fell back. But again the officers forced them to the walls ; this time they scaled it and fell over it in crowds. By sheer weight of numbers they forced the Texans across the convent yard and into the hospital.

The captured cannon were turned upon the 'dobe walls of the hospital and smashed them in ; a howitzer, loaded with musket balls and broken iron, was fired into the building and the Texans fell like sheep. Then a desperate hand-to-hand conflict ensued. Crockett, Travis and Bonham fought like the heroes of old. Knife, pistol and clubbed rifle played their parts. Jim Bowie had been wounded while defending the wall early in the fight. He lay upon a bed, coolly firing one pistol after another as the Mexicans showed themselves. But he was finally killed by a musket shot.

From room to room fought the Texans, contesting every step of the way ; the proof of their desperation is the great number of



A DESPERATE HAND-TO-HAND CONFLICT ENSUED

WITH DAVY CROCKETT

Mexicans who fell in this bloody close-quarters fight; forty-five bodies were counted in one spot after all was over.

Travis fell here, and so did the brave Colonel Bonham. With his loved rifle clubbed in his hands and with many a foe-man stretched beside him, fell that gallant Tennessean, Davy Crockett, defending a doorway. Like fiends, the Mexicans, urged by the bloody minded Santa Anna, stabbed and shot, and when the fight was done, every Texan in the Alamo was dead.

News traveled slowly in those days and the boys had reached the Mississippi once more, they had said good-bye to Sid and Bill Hutchinson and Dolph, and were about to embark upon a steamboat for Louisville, when a New Orleans newspaper caught their eyes. And in it they saw the first news of the fall of the Alamo, and of the noble death of Colonel Crockett.

Ethel Norton was as shocked at the news

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as they were, for the boys had been telling her of the backwoodsman's good nature and rare qualities of heart.

"And to think," said she, the big tears starting in her eyes, "that all his high hopes should end in death."

"But it will not be for nothing," said Walter Jordan. "Men like Colonel Crockett and Travis and Bowie do not die this way without making a stir. Who knows but their death will so arouse Texas and the Texans that they will not wait to be attacked—that it may make them carry the war to Santa Anna, and so set their country free."

And it was not long after the three had arrived in Louisville, and Ethel Norton with the services of the elder Mr. Jordan had proved her identity, that news from far-away Texas showed Walter's judgment to have been good. Texas had declared herself free; Santa Anna had marched another army against her, and was met by

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a force under the celebrated Sam Houston on the San Jacinto River. The Mexicans were utterly defeated, Santa Anna was a prisoner, and the Lone Star flag had taken its place among the emblems of the world.

CHAPTER XV

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF DAVID CROCKETT

DAVID CROCKETT was born August 17, 1786, at Rogersville, Tennessee. He came of Irish ancestry, his grandparents settling in Pennsylvania. Afterward they traveled southwest and made their home in what was then the wilderness of Tennessee. In one of the almost countless Indian attacks upon the settlers they were both killed.

It is not known if John Crockett, their son, and father of David, was born on the ocean crossing to America, or in Ireland. At any rate, he grew up in America, and fought gallantly in the Revolution.

He married a Mary Hankins who lived in that rich farming region near the town of York, Pa. They had three daughters and six sons; David was the fifth child,

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and first saw the light of day on the banks of the Nolachuky River, Tennessee.

At the age of eight years David was engaged by a drover to help take care of his cattle. But after two weeks on the road he ran away, joined a wagon train and returned home.

Soon after this young Davy got into a scrape at school. He had a fight with a boy much larger and older than himself and thrashed him ; then, fearing what the schoolmaster would say, he played truant. When Davy's father heard of this he sought out his son. But the boy eluded him. And so we find him in the situation of fearing to go to school and also fearing to go home. So he ran away, engaged with another drover and traveled into Virginia.

The boy drifted about the country for a time, working for drovers and wagoners ; once at Baltimore he was upon the point of going to sea, but the teamster with whom he was then engaged refused to allow him to go.

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After suffering a great deal of bad usage, he made up his mind to go back home to Tennessee. To escape a whipping at the hands of his father he had endured hardships that were worse than a thousand whippings. He dreaded what they'd say to him and more than once hesitated on the journey home. But he was welcomed with open arms.

Now came the time for Davy to show the stuff he was made of; his father was in debt, and the boy, now large and strong and fifteen years of age, set to work to pay this off. It was accomplished in a year's time, and by hard, steady toil, such as none of the family had ever dreamed him capable of.

The boy up to this time had little or no education; and so he set about getting one. In six months he had learned to read and write and do sums in arithmetic; this was all the schooling he ever had.

And through all this time the woods of-

WITH DAVY CROCKETT

ferred the young man a fair chance to gratify his love for wandering and hunting. Little by little his skill grew, and before many years he was considered the most deadly marksman in all Tennessee.

While still very young, Crockett married an Irish girl, Polly Finlay; and they began their housekeeping in a log cabin. Attracted by the hunting grounds and an opportunity to better his condition in life, he, his wife, and two boys later crossed the mountains with their household goods into Lincoln County and settled on Elk River.

Here in this paradise of the hunter Crockett's skill grew and grew. There were many mighty hunters in that day, but not one whose celebrity approached that of Crockett.

But then the second war with England came on; Tecumseh rallied the Indian tribes against the white settlers who had begun to occupy their hunting grounds.

The Creek chief, Weatherford, attacked

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Fort Mimms with a war party of fifteen hundred braves. The fort was taken by surprise, and out of the garrison of two hundred and seventy-five only seventeen escaped.

This was the beginning of the Creek War. General Andrew Jackson was made commander of the American army sent against the savages. And in this army Crockett served as a volunteer.

During the campaign against the Creeks, Crockett undertook many dangerous scouting trips and took part in the battle of Tallushatchee, and also that of Taladega. His daring brought him prominently before the public eye in all the movements of the army against the Indians. Afterward he re-enlisted and joined Russell's Spies, with whom he performed many difficult feats of enterprise and courage. After the battle of Enotochopko his time again expired, and once more he reënlisted and fought to the end of the Creek War.

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Two years after his return home his wife died ; and not a great while afterward he married once more. It was about this time that he went upon an exploring expedition into the Creek country, where he was taken dangerously ill.

Later he removed with his family into the section bought by the government from the Chickasaw Nation. He established a home at the head of Shoal Creek, and was shortly after elected justice of the peace, and later still, colonel of a regiment of frontier militia.

As time went on, Crockett grew more and more in the public eye ; he was just the sort of picturesque character that would please the rough and ready settlers ; his marksmanship, his ready, backwoods eloquence made him the popular choice and he was sent to the Legislature. Afterward he ran for Congress and was defeated.

But it takes more than a single defeat to discourage a man like Crockett ; and so the

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following election he ran again and was elected. He created a sensation in Washington during his stay in the city during his first and second terms as a Congressman. All the big cities of the east were also delighted to greet and entertain him upon one occasion when he visited them. But on his third attempt for the Congressional seat, he was defeated. Then he went to Texas.

There is not a great deal known of Colonel Crockett's trip across the plains to the town of San Antonio ; and even less of his doings after he got there. But that he fought as brave a fight as any of the other heroic defenders of the Alamo, those who knew him best were positive ; and his name will live always in the annals of the Great West.

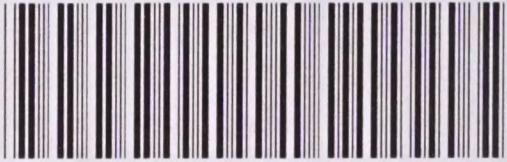
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